

THERE'S ONLY ONE 'L' IN
COLT MCCOY
PAGE 18



NFL

WHERE JAKE DELHOMME LEADS,
THE PANTHERS FOLLOW

NBA

HOW CHRIS PAUL HAS
LEARNED FROM LOSS

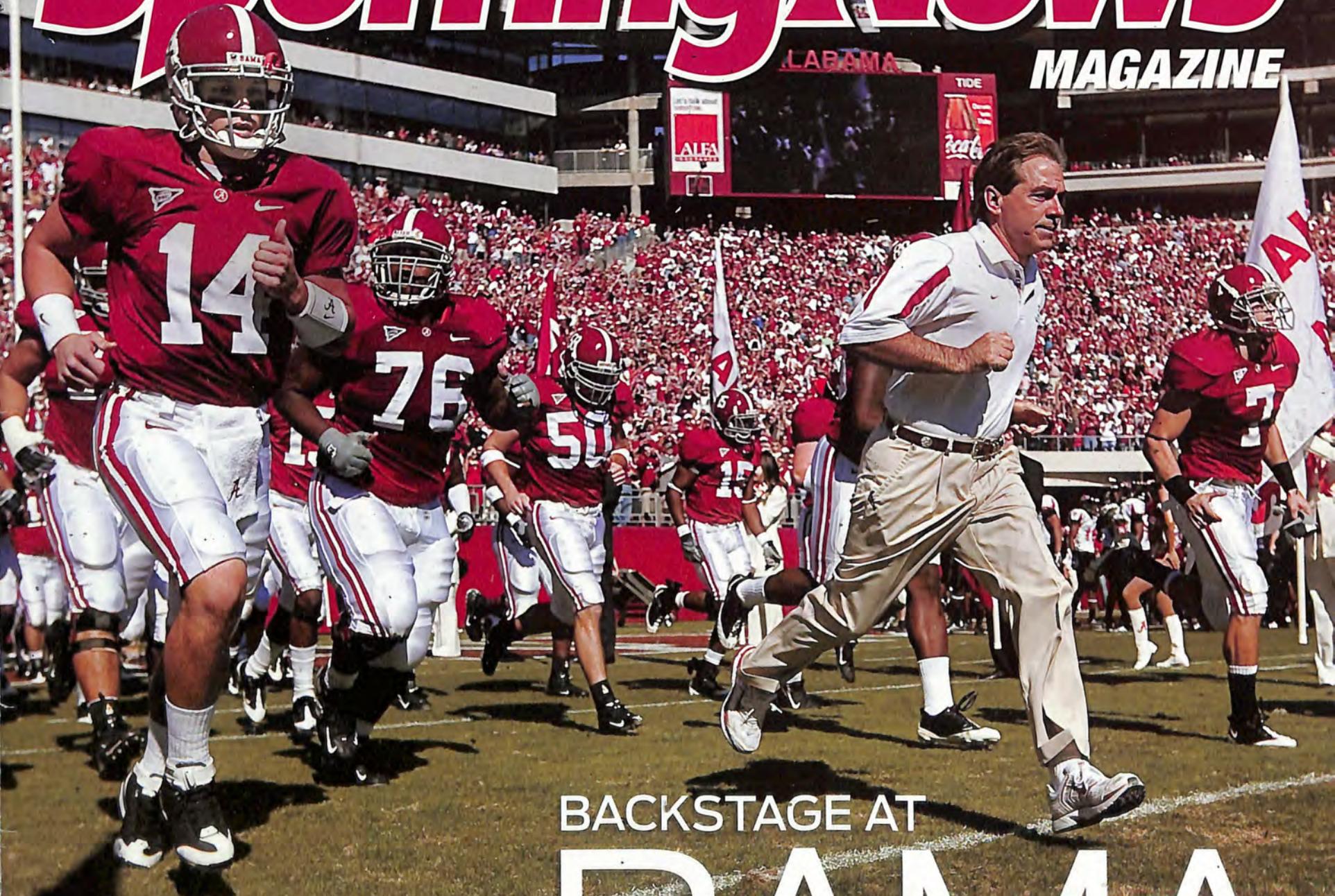
SN CONVERSATION

COACH K IS JUST GETTING
WARMED UP AT DUKE

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

Sporting News

MAGAZINE

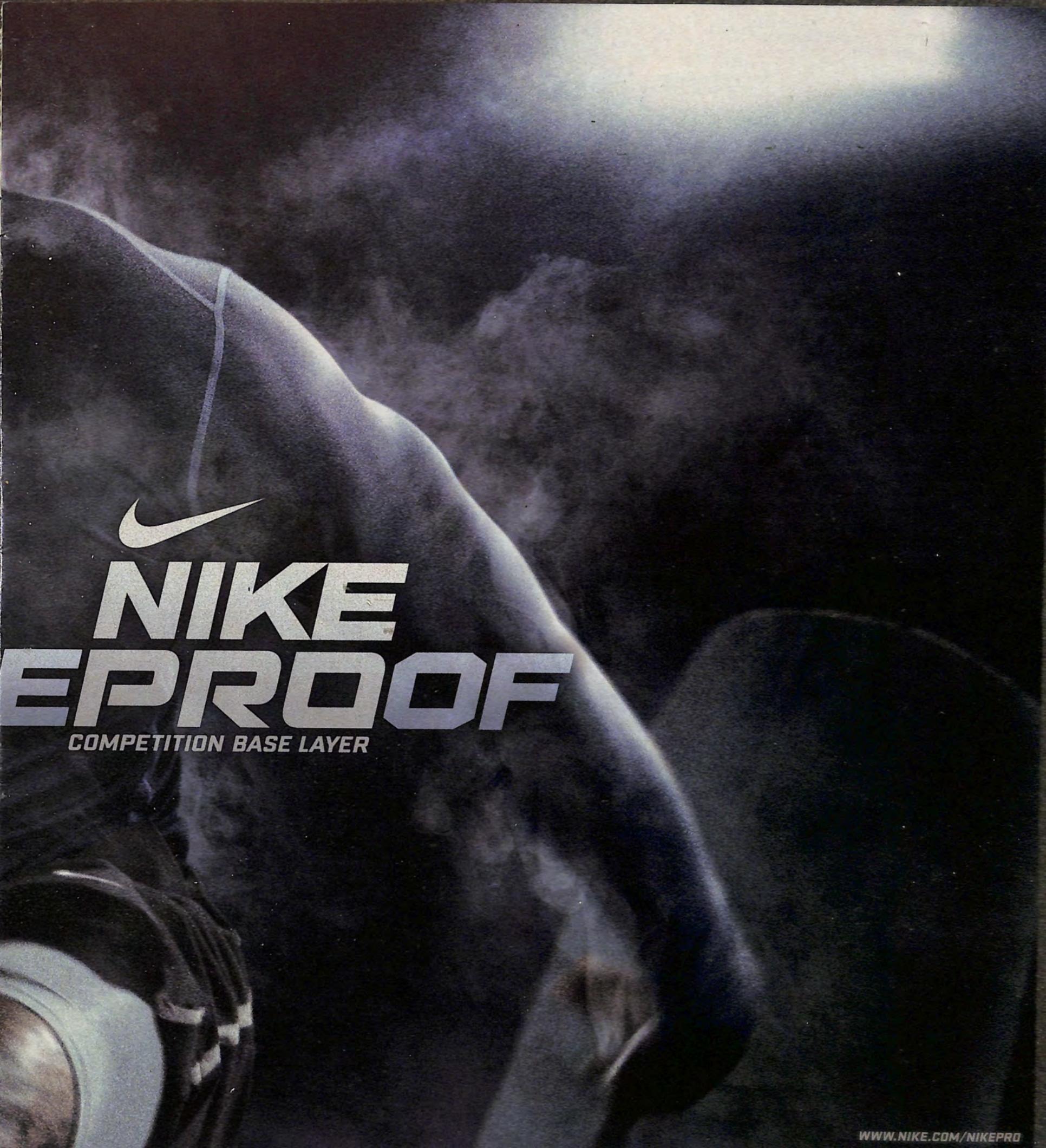


BACKSTAGE AT

BAMA

SPEND A LONG WEEKEND WITH NICK SABAN
AND THE NO. 1 TEAM IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL

BATTLE



NIKE
EPROOF
COMPETITION BASE LAYER

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NOVEMBER 24, 2008 | No. 46



ON THE COVER

26 All-Access: Alabama

When Nick Saban tells his guys, "You have to ask yourself, whether we win or lose, if you improved as a football player," they listen. After all, there's no question Saban has improved Alabama as a football program. We went behind the scenes with the top-ranked Tide to see how.

Cover photography by Bob Leverone / SN

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

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34 They will follow him

The Panthers' Jake Delhomme isn't the most talented quarterback in the NFL, but he knows how to lead: "When he stands in that huddle, there's only one voice. All of them listen to him." — By Dennis Dillon

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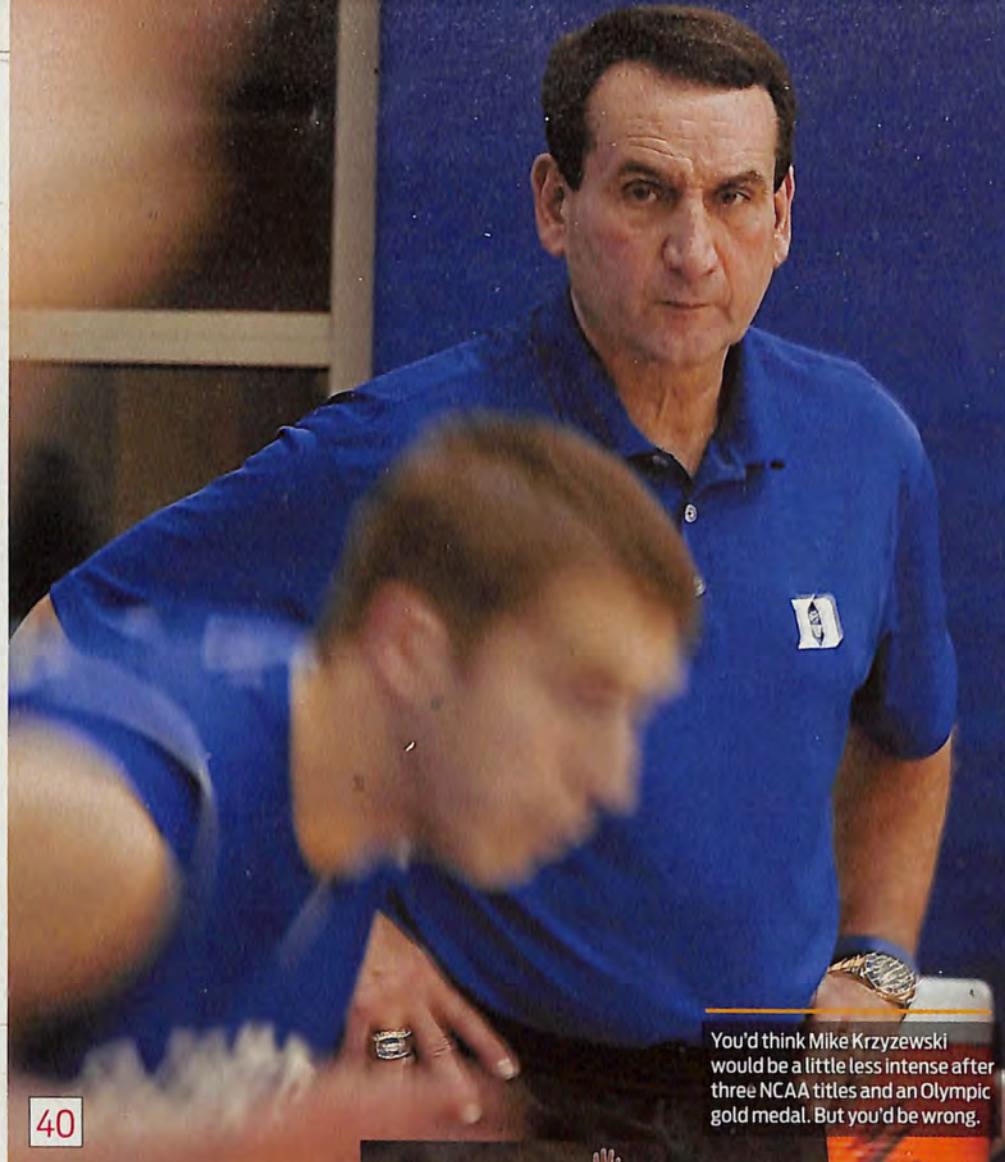
A gold medal hasn't made Duke's basketball coach complacent. If anything, his success in Beijing has motivated him: "We need to play like we have something to prove, not like we're preserving Duke's legacy." — By Mike DeCourcey

46 Blessings borne in sorrow

"What he has done in the past year, most people could not handle in an entire career." And what has happened to Chris Paul in the past six years, most people could not handle—certainly not as well—in a lifetime. — By Sean Devaney

50 The ice has thawed

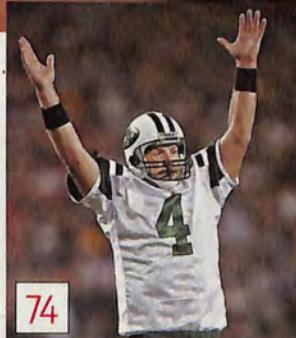
New owner Rocky Wirtz has repaired the relationship between the NHL's Blackhawks and their fans: "Rocky knew exactly what he was going to do, and he hit the ground running. It was a rebirth of hockey in this town." — By Craig Custance



You'd think Mike Krzyzewski would be a little less intense after three NCAA titles and an Olympic gold medal. But you'd be wrong.

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Somehow, Brett Favre, Aaron Rodgers and Chad Pennington all are doing pretty darn well.

SPECIAL GUESTS

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MULTIMEDIA

Sporting News MAGAZINE

And *Sporting News'* NASCAR driver of the year is ... We'll hand out our annual awards, including the Dale Earnhardt tough driver of the year, in the next issue. Got a thought on who you'd like to see us pick? E-mail it, along with your name and city, to yourturn@sportingnews.com.

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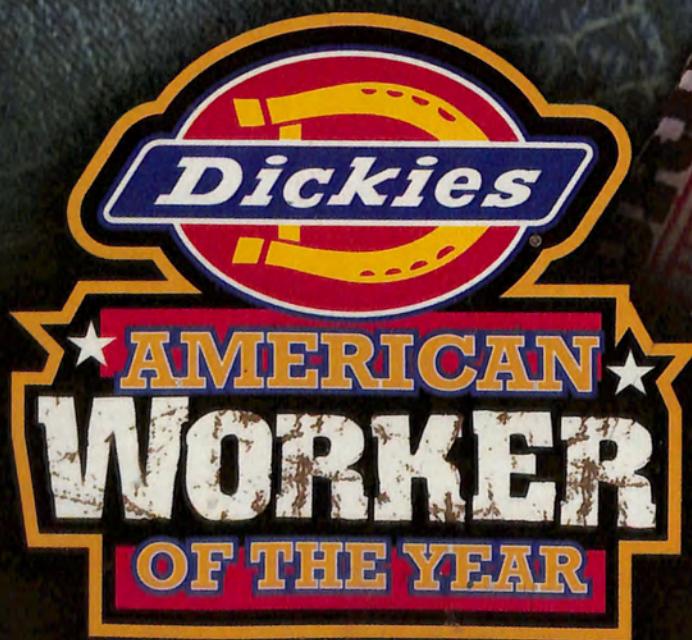
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Sporting News .com

With college football's silly season upon us, check out Matt Hayes' weekly Hot Seat Report every Thursday. Who'll get the Syracuse job now that Greg Robinson is out? Where might Lane Kiffin land? Matt tackles all of that—and more.

We Have A Winner!

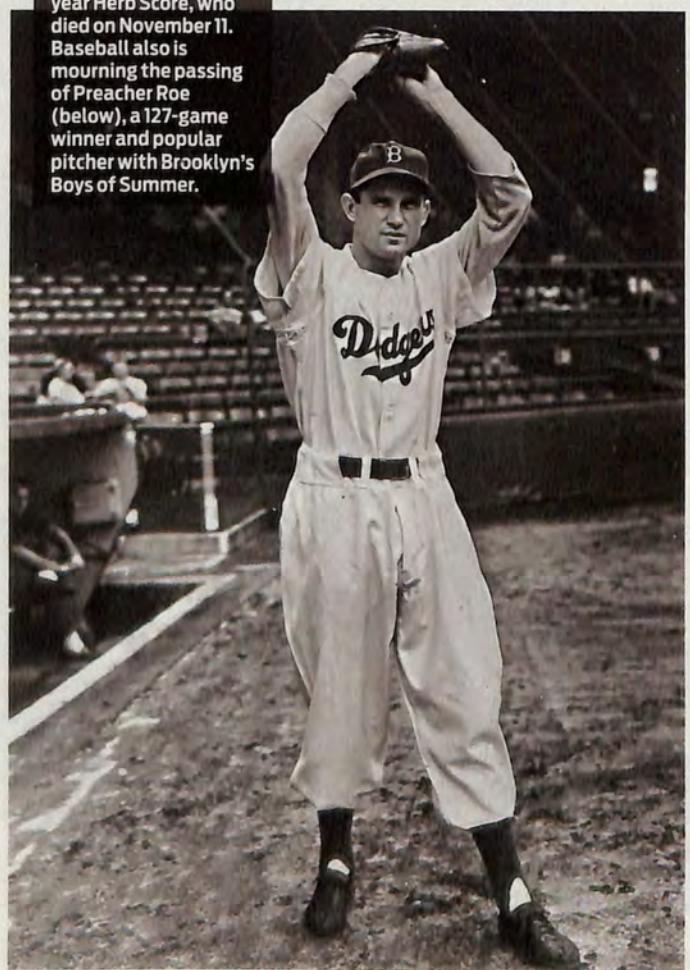
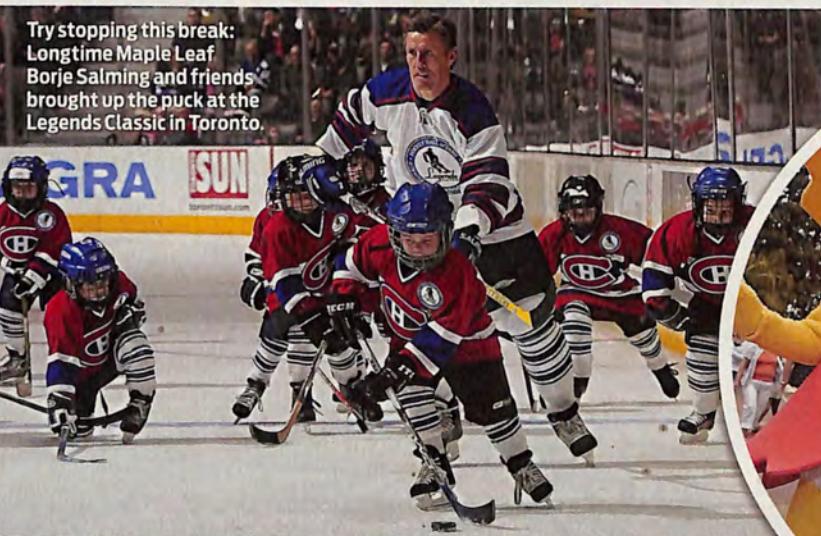
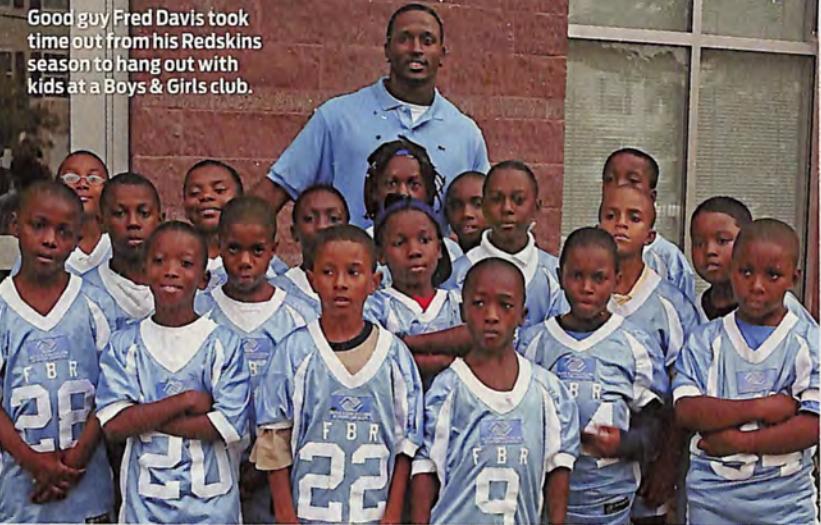
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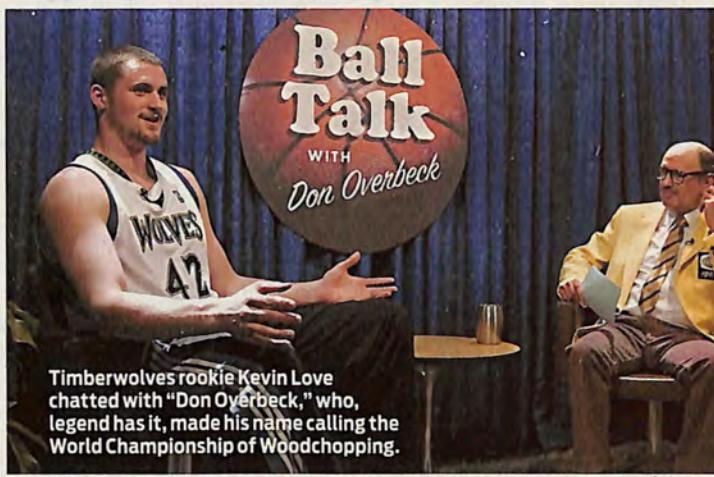
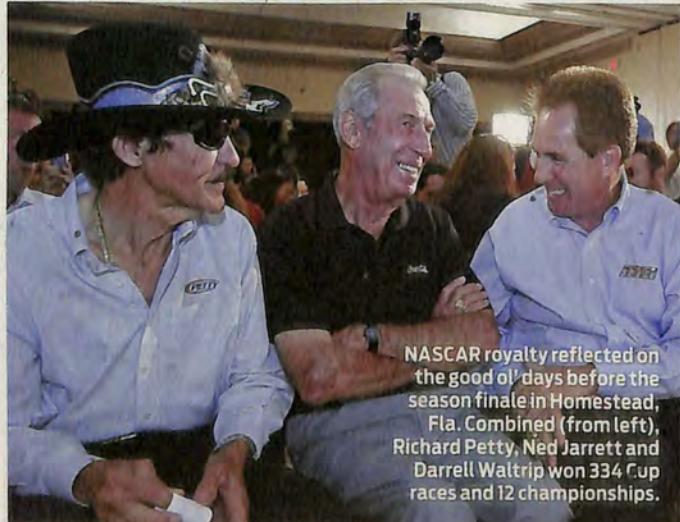
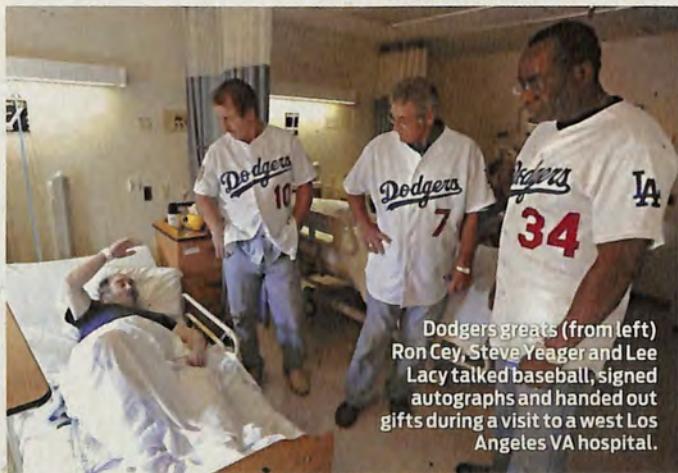
CONGRATULATIONS!

In Pictures





Two months after another d'oh of a finish to the season, Mets shortstop Jose Reyes joked around with Lisa and Bart Simpson at Universal Orlando.



Since You Asked ...

You have questions, we have answers

YOUR QUESTION:

Does Deron Williams think his level of play went to the next level after recovering from his broken jaw in college?

—David Rakers, Quincy, Ill.

YOUR QUESTION:

I already miss Jason Taylor down here in South Florida. How tough has it been for him, after spending such a long time in Miami, to not come to that stadium every day, to not wear those Dolphins colors, to be in a new, strange city?

—Jane Sorenson, Miami

YOUR QUESTION:

If Dale Earnhardt Jr. were to put a letter grade on his first season with his new team, what would it be—and why?

—Charlie Lockett, Nashville

YOUR QUESTION:

In this day of overpriced athletes with underwhelming fundamentals, old schoolers like myself miss one of the greatest professional athletes—and class acts—of all-time: John Havlicek. What is Hondo doing these days?

—Chuck Peters, Scottsdale, Ariz.

YOUR QUESTION:

I love listening to Joe Morgan and Jon Miller. During the World Series, I leave the TV on, turn down the sound and listen to Jon and Joe calling the game (on ESPN Radio). What makes them such a great team?

—Mary Trujillo, Houston

Write us

It's like *Jeopardy!*: All letters to the editor must be phrased in the form of a question, even if it's "Why wasn't Colt McCoy on your cover instead of Alabama?" We'll choose our favorites and answer them in this space and regularly in *Sporting News Today*. E-mail your questions to yourturn@sportingnews.com, along with your name and hometown.

THEIR ANSWER:

Deron Williams

Jazz, Redeem Team point guard

David,
Breaking my jaw as a sophomore at Illinois really wasn't as big of a deal as people made it out to be. I lost a little bit of weight, but I gained it all back. The reason I've gotten to the next level is just a lot of hard work. I lost weight before the draft, and I've kept it off since then. I just try to come back in better shape every year. You know, just working hard every day in the gym has been the key.



THEIR ANSWER:

Jason Taylor

Six-time Pro Bowl selection

Jane,
I had 11 great years with Miami and always have been very appreciative of the support of the Dolphins fans. I have a lot of friends in South Florida who I am very close with. The Redskins organization, my new teammates and coaches have been very supportive and receptive. It is always challenging to move to a new city, especially since I was in one place for 11 years. But the one constant is change, and this has been an exciting start with our early success.

THEIR ANSWER:

Dale Earnhardt Jr.

NASCAR's most popular driver

Charlie,
It's been a flattering and humbling season. Being with Hendrick, that was flattering. You get appreciated for when you do good; you get help when you do bad. You get people trying to help you keep that from happening again. There are a lot of times in the middle of the season when you're getting worn out and you don't feel appreciated, and that never happened all year. I don't think it's fair to grade our season. It's been successful, and we have something to build on.



THEIR ANSWER:

John Havlicek

Basketball Hall of Famer

Chuck,
I live in Weston, Mass., most of the year. I spend summers in Cape Cod and winters in West Palm Beach, Fla. I'm the co-owner of three Wendy's (Westchester County, N.Y.) and part-owner of Lakeview Farms (Delphos, Ohio), where they make dips, puddings, gelatins and cheesecake. I enjoy fishing, golf, hunting ... and my five grandchildren.

Dale Earnhardt Jr.

THEIR ANSWER:

Jon Miller

ESPN play-by-play announcer

Mary,

I'm truly honored to hear you made such an effort to listen to Joe and me during the World Series—and that you think we make a great team. We come to the game from different places—Joe is the former great player, while I'm the longtime fan and play-by-play announcer—but we both have a passion for the game and a love of being at the ballpark. Baseball is always fun for us. Perhaps, Mary, for you too?

Blog on

What Obama can do for sports

Posted by: suntzu4m

With the election of Barack Obama, everyone is putting together lists of things he should do when he is inaugurated—fix the economy, deal with the war in Iraq, address health care ... the list goes on and on. The future prez is a sports guy, so I say let's deal with the problems we have in the world of sports.

GMC WE ARE PROFESSIONAL GRADE.

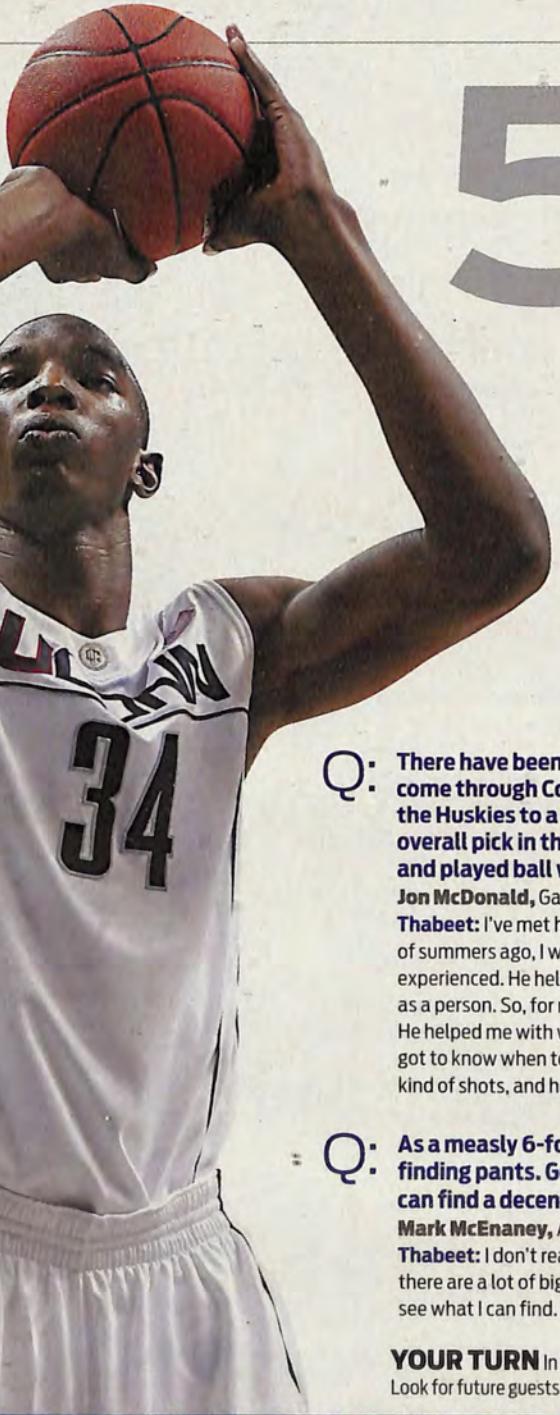
A few things I hope the president-elect will consider enacting as soon as he gets into office:

► Eliminate the BCS and replace it with a national championship playoff. It is un-American to have the national champion decided by a bunch of journalists and computers.

► Institute a mandatory retirement age for franchise ownership. If you are eligible for Social Security, then you need to pass your franchise along to a family member or sell it off ... and you Raiders fans can thank me later.

► Appoint George W. Bush the commissioner of baseball. I don't know what he would do, but (a) it would be better than Bud, and (b) the press conferences would be entertaining.

To see more of suntzu4m's blog, and many others, read the community blogs at sportingnews.com.



5 QUESTIONS for Hasheem Thabeet

He's 7-3, agile and—bad news, Big East—still getting better. Hasheem Thabeet passed on the pros and is back for his junior season at Connecticut, where last year he broke Alonzo Mourning's Big East record for blocked shots in a regular season. The league's reigning defensive player of the year didn't reject any questions from *Sporting News* readers.

Q: **The Big East is loaded this year, and many people are calling it the toughest conference in the country. Which post player in the Big East would you say is your toughest matchup, and why?**

Joe Coombs, Alexandria, Va.

Thabeet: Luke Harangody from Notre Dame. Sizewise, there's a lot of times he's not going to try and post me up, so he wants to go outside and shoot. Actually, I was effective against him when we went to Notre Dame last year and I ended up holding him to (14 points on 5-of-23 shooting). But the second game, when they came back to Connecticut, he had 32 points, and I thought he was big. You know, he was making all the jump shots, and I think that's a tough matchup because I keep going outside with him. Hopefully, it will be a better matchup next time because he's a really good player.

Q: **There have been some good big men who have come through Connecticut. Emeka Okafor led the Huskies to a national title and was the No. 2 overall pick in the NBA draft. Have you ever met and played ball with him?**

Jon McDonald, Gainesville, Fla.

Thabeet: I've met him a couple times. Actually, a couple of summers ago, I worked out against him. He's really experienced. He helps me get better as a player and grow up as a person. So, for me, getting to meet Emeka was just great. He helped me with when's the right time to take shots. You've got to know when to position yourself or when to take what kind of shots, and he was good with that.

Q: **As a measly 6-foot-8, even I have problems finding pants. Got any good tips on where a guy can find a decent pair of jeans?**

Mark McEnaney, Atlanta

Thabeet: I don't really have a problem with it. You know, there are a lot of big-and-tall stores. I shop online a lot and see what I can find. (Thabeet also wears a Size 18 shoe.)

YOUR TURN In each issue, we'll give readers the reporter's notebook and have them ask questions of a big-name sports personality. Look for future guests in *Sporting News Today*.

Q: **I know you've talked about helping your native Tanzania and recently met with the Tanzanian president in New York. After you become a professional basketball player, what will you do to help Tanzania and how will you do it?**

Marc Goldstein, Southborough, Mass.

Thabeet: I've thought about maybe going back and starting to run some basketball camps. Just to do some things for schools, just any kind of way you can help people (improve) their life situations.

Q: **What is the toughest place you've had to play while at Connecticut?**

Derick Redding, Jacksonville

Thabeet: My freshman year, the first road game we played was against West Virginia. It was real scary. It was an experience—we ended up losing that game, too. At the time, I had just been in Connecticut, playing exhibition games and some regular-season games, and then we get to West Virginia. It was tough.

—Ken Bradley

THIS SEASON, IT'S LEGAL TO PUT
EIGHT PEOPLE IN MOTION.

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Survey Says ...

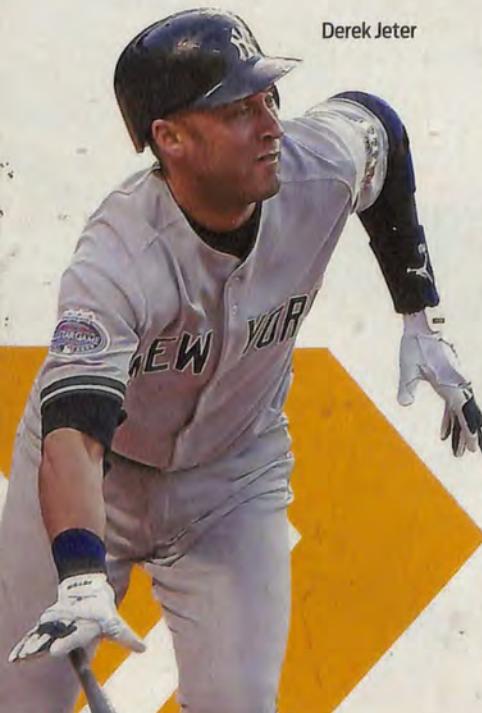
- Better pinstripe pickup: CC Sabathia or Manny Ramirez?
- Brian Cashman: smart shopper or senseless spender?

Sporting News surveyed a baker's dozen former Yankees for answers to those questions and more

SN's panel

Jim Abbott	P, 1993-94
Ron Blomberg	DH, 1969-76
Rick Cerone	C, 1980-84, 1987, 1990
Andy Fox	IF, 1996-97
Mike Gallego	2B/SS, 1992-94
Tommy John	P, 1979-82, 1986-89
Phil Linz	SS, 1962-65
Gil McDougald	IF, 1951-60
Moose Skowron	1B, 1954-62
Virgil Trucks	P, 1958
Bob Turley	P, 1955-62
Randy Velarde	IF/OF, 1987-95, 2001
Mike Witt	P, 1990-93

Derek Jeter



On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the job Brian Cashman has done as general manager?

► Average score	7.9
► High score (2 votes)	10
► Low (1 vote)	5

They said it

- "We could have had both (Carlos) Beltran and (Johan) Santana." — **Phil Linz**
 "Anyone who has kept that job as long as Brian has must be doing a great job." — **Mike Gallego**
 "Brian has been great, but you have to have the players." — **Moose Skowron**



Brian Cashman

Which free agent should the Yankees pursue most aggressively this offseason?

► CC Sabathia	10
► Manny Ramirez	1½
► A.J. Burnett	1
► "Top-flight catcher"	½

They said it

- "Any team would be better with CC Sabathia. But Manny in New York would be unbelievable." — **Jim Abbott**
 "The Yankees need a No. 1 and 2 starter. Then (Chien-Ming) Wang could pitch at No. 3, (Joba) Chamberlain at No. 4 and (Phil) Hughes, (Ian) Kennedy or (Mike) Mussina at No. 5. But the money they would pay Mussina could be used for the No. 1 and 2 starter, Sabathia and A.J. Burnett would be ideal." — **Tommy John**
 "Pitching wins championships. Sabathia has shown his endurance over the years. He's also shown he can be the horse you can ride." — **Mike Witt**

What Yankee would you want as your teammate?

► Derek Jeter	11
► Mariano Rivera	1
► Jason Giambi	½
► Joe Girardi	½

They said it

- "Mariano Rivera is the best closer of all time." — **Rick Cerone**

We say George Steinbrenner.

You say ...

► Winner	5
► Greatness	2

Also receiving votes: Competitor, dictator, fearless, fierce, power, spender.

They said it

- "I never had the chance to play for him, but he knows baseball inside and out. I only met the man once, but he impressed me more than all the owners I've met." — **Virgil Trucks**
 "The man who bought the Yankees for \$8.5 million and turned them into the best in baseball." — **Tommy John**

What is the key missing element the franchise needs to regain to get back to the World Series?

► Starting pitching	4½
► Health	2
► Leadership	1½

Also receiving votes: Scouting/G.M., Joe Torre, strength up the middle, teamwork.

They said it

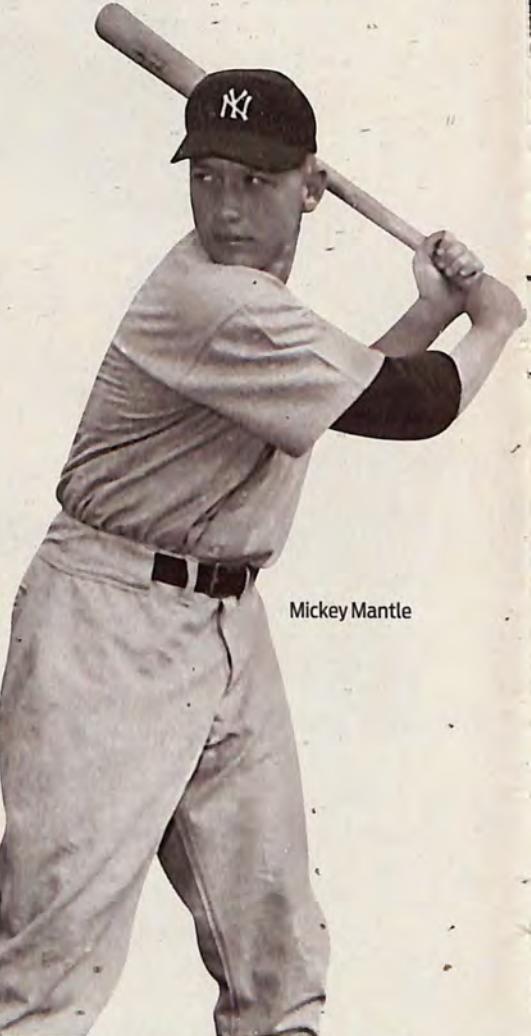
- "Play as a team." — **Bob Turley**
 "A fire, like (Paul) O'Neill had." — **Rick Cerone**
 "They should have never, never let Joe Torre—the best manager in baseball—go." — **Virgil Trucks**
 "The scouting system and a G.M. who has played the game. Someone like Pat Gillick." — **Phil Linz**
 "They need to get younger and be able to play small ball when the game calls for it. Hank Steinbrenner is very competitive, and he will find a way to get the Yankees back to the top." — **Tommy John**

For the Yankees to get back to the World Series, do they need to overhaul things or just tweak them?

► Tweak	9
► Overhaul	4

They said it

- "They need ... an emphasis on speed the next two years. They can be tweaked and win in 2009 with the right acquisitions. Think Mark Teixeira at first base, not (Johnny) Damon in center and Sabathia and Burnett pitching." — **Phil Linz**
 "Overhaul. Giambi, (Robinson) Cano and (Melky) Cabrera are out. They need to get younger." — **Rick Cerone**



Mickey Mantle

Who's the greatest Yankee since Babe Ruth?

► Mickey Mantle	5½
► Lou Gehrig	3½
► Joe DiMaggio	1½

Also receiving votes: Yogi Berra, Derek Jeter, Don Mattingly.

They said it

- "Derek Jeter doesn't need a 'C' on his jersey. Everyone knows who the captain is." — **Andy Fox**

— Jeff D'Alessio



It has been eight long years since the Yankees last celebrated a World Series championship.



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Will's World

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It's an age-old question (Why can't we win?) vs. an old-age question (Why won't he retire?)



*Will Leitch is the author of three books, including *God Save The Fan*. He is the founding editor of Deadspin and a contributing editor at New York magazine.*

I can't think of a sight in sports that made me sadder than Joe Paterno in the press box after Penn State's last-second loss to Iowa. He seemed so much more alone up there, a wizened, beloved old man helpless to stop what went on 100 feet below him. It felt like the end of something.

I'm wrong, though, to feel so sad. Not that one shouldn't have sympathy for the great JoePa or feel deprived of the glorious story line that Penn State winning the (mythical, I remind) national title in what could be Paterno's final year could have been. But the era for guys like Paterno has been over for a decade, probably longer. This is for the best. Fans need variety.

Let's look at what it means to be a fan and how that is reflected in a team's coaching situation. Technically, your team is in one of five states:

1. Champion/Perpetual Contender. The Patriots, Red Sox, Phillies, Colts, Cardinals (St. Louis), Spurs, Lakers, Celtics, Steelers, Giants (New York). Their coaches are at the top of their games and are considered among the best in their field.

2. A Step Away. The Buccaneers, Titans, Hornets, Cavaliers, Eagles, Dodgers, Cubs, Panthers. By any measure a success but unable (so far) to reach that upper rung. Their coaches' jobs are safe, at least for another couple of years.

3. Reeling. The Chargers, Jaguars, Mets, Blue Jays, Saints, Rockies, Browns, Mavericks, Brewers, Nuggets, Warriors. Expectations have not been met. Their coaches know better than to turn on sports radio.

4. Rebuilding/On The Way Up. The



Who wasn't pulling for JoePa to make it through the Big Ten season undefeated?

Bold, daring predictions

1. Duke basketball will be on television 47 times in the next two weeks. Why can't someone put Duke in the Big Ten so it can play on the Big Ten Network, which means no one would be able to watch them?

2. The Lions-Titans game on Thanksgiving will, as all lousy Thanksgiving games do, ruin your holiday. When those games are over by halftime, you're forced to talk to your family. It's quite frustrating.

3. Ron Zook is going to burst a blood vessel attempting to convince his Illini that reaching the Motor City Bowl is a matter of monstrous importance and national security. The sad thing is, as an alum, I'll agree with him. Bring on Central Michigan! If you want to compare bowl projections—I project that there will be many, many bowls—e-mail me at will@deadspin.com and we'll chat and be friends.



What's on your mind, Ron Zook? Jeff Allen (left) and Jon Asamoah want to know.

People of the Fortnight

Kurt Warner. Unless something goes horrifically wrong—and with this team, it just might—Warner is going to take my beloved Arizona Cardinals to the playoffs for the first time in a decade. I love Kurt Warner, for a multitude of reasons. Here's one: Asked what he was thinking as the 49ers lined up for a potential winning touchdown on *Monday Night Football*, Warner replied, "How awesome God is." Whatever your theology, this is astounding, and I don't doubt it for a second. I'm pretty sure that's what he's thinking when he's pouring juice for his kids or pumping gas or washing his hands. Kurt Warner, you're pretty awesome, too.

Bob Knight. It's a delicious irony that the General has become one of the more enjoyable members of the media. Knight, who will do college basketball broadcasts this season with Brent Musburger, is not just knowledgeable (obviously) but also deliriously entertaining. This is like watching Marv Albert suddenly come on court and start diagramming triangle-and-two defenses.



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Subject: Auto Reply
To: K Clark

Out of office auto reply:

Currently patrolling off the southern coast of Oahu.
Unfortunately, I'll be back on Monday.

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**NAVY
RESERVE**

Next Gen

Bright and early

A look at college basketball's early signing period



Kenny Boynton

By Brian McLaughlin

1. NORTH CAROLINA



One to watch:

John Henson, PF, 6-10, Sickles (Tampa).

Start scheming now, ACC coaches: "I believe he will be a perimeter player for us," Roy Williams says of Henson, who stands an inch taller than All-American bruiser Tyler Hansbrough.

2. TEXAS



One to watch:

Jordan Hamilton, SF, 6-7, Dominguez (Los Angeles).

The YouTube sensation can play four positions—and dominate at any of them. But not until 2009: He's ineligible to play high school ball this season after already playing for four years.

3. FLORIDA



One to watch:

Kenny Boynton, SG, 6-2, American Heritage (Plantation, Fla.). "He's always in attack mode," says Plantation coach Danny Herz.

4. VILLANOVA



One to watch:

Maalik Wayns, PG, 6-1, Roman Catholic (Philadelphia). One of three top 65 recruits for Jay Wright, the court-savvy Wayns stayed true to a commitment he made after his sophomore year.

5. DUKE



One to watch:

Ryan Kelly, PF, 6-10½, Ravenscroft (Raleigh, N.C.).

"He has the ability to get his own shot off the dribble—and that's something that doesn't happen often to a kid who is 6-10," Ravenscroft coach Kevin Billerman says.

Sporting News' **top 10 classes**

7. INDIANA



One to watch:

Maurice Creek, SG, 6-4, Hargrave Military (Chatham, Va.).

"A prolific scorer," says first-year IU coach Tom Crean, who recruited Creek while at Marquette. No program needs help more than the Hoosiers.

8. UCLA



One to watch:

Tyler Honeycutt, SF, 6-8, Sylmar (Calif.).

This lifelong Bruins fan shot up the recruiting rankings after a super summer. Future coach Ben Howland loves his inside-outside game.

9. KENTUCKY



One to watch:

Daniel Orton, C, 6-9, Bishop McGuinness (Oklahoma City).

UK coach Billy Gillispie raves about his "off-the-charts" IQ, "NBA body" and "unbelievable" hands. He'll miss his senior season following knee surgery.

10. WASHINGTON



One to watch:

Abdul Gaddy, PG, 6-3, Bellarmine (Tacoma, Wash.).

This spot could have belonged to Arizona had Washington's reigning player of the year not withdrawn his pledge following Lute Olson's retirement.

Why I picked ...

► NORTH CAROLINA

John Henson

Rivals.com rank: 6th

"One of the reasons is because my mom's side of the family lives only about an hour away from campus up there. Those are my only living grandparents, and they've never seen me play before. So, with me being that close, they can come up and see me now. It's great for them. I was born in Greensboro, and it's always been one of my favorite colleges. That factored in, too."

► CONNECTICUT

Alex Oriakhi

C, 6-8½, Tilton (N.H.)

Rivals.com rank: 21st

"They're a defensive team, and they led the country in blocking shots, and that's what I do. I'll fit in perfectly. I can rebound and block, and they get the ball to the big men. With guys like Emeka Okafor playing there, you know they use the big man. I've always been a UConn fan. I watched a bio on Okafor when I was a kid. He's from the same part of Africa my father was—Nigeria. When they offered, I jumped right on it, two years ago."

► VILLANOVA

Maalik Wayns

Rivals.com rank: 25th

"It's a guard type of school, and that's my style. I just looked at all the guys who have come out of there and how they flourished in that offense, and I want to do the same thing. Coach (Jay) Wright, he'll put four guards on the court at the same time and just run. I always knew who Coach Wright was. The first time I met him was like my 10th-grade year. We're real close. He's very outgoing."



► JOHN WALL

PG, 6-4, Word of God

Christian (Raleigh, N.C.)

Rivals.com rank: 1st

Memphis and Kansas have had him in for visits, and Duke shouldn't be discounted. Wall has everything a coach wants in a point guard: quickness, tremendous ballhandling ability and great court vision.

Who's left?

Not every player chose to sign on the first day of the early period. Three top prospects who may wait to sign in the late period (April 15-May 20):



► XAVIER HENRY

SG, 6-6, Putnam City

(Oklahoma City)

Rivals.com rank: 3rd

Kansas or Memphis? One of the 2008 national title game participants will land the nation's top shooting guard. Henry, who has drawn comparisons to the Celtics' Ray Allen, digs defense as much as he does scoring.

► DERRICK FAVORS

C, 6-9, South Atlanta

Rivals.com rank: 4th

Georgia Tech landed three Peach State prospects ranked in Rivals' top 100, including Glen Rice Jr. If the Jackets beat Georgia, N.C. State and Memphis for Favors, Paul Hewitt's class will crack the top five. Favors had 19 triple doubles as a junior.

My Turn

Compete for a Rhodes Scholarship or an ACC division title? It's not a choice a lot of people will have to make

By Myron Rolle



I moved closer to one of my goals last month when I learned I was a finalist for a Rhodes Scholarship. Unfortunately, the honor presents a conflict. The day of the final interviews for the scholarship, November 22, is also the day my Florida State football team goes to Maryland for a game that could decide the ACC Atlantic Division title.

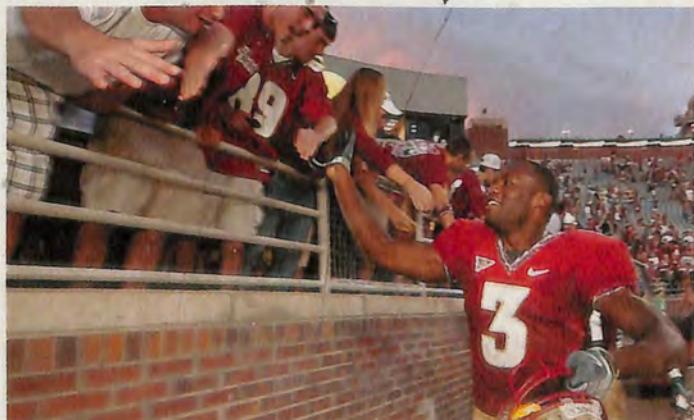
I decided a while back that I would attend the interview in Birmingham, Ala., even if it meant missing the game. There was no wrestling with the decision at all. This is an honor that I really want, one I've sought since my freshman year at FSU. And I've worked extremely hard to put myself in position to apply. Now, at the final step, this is an opportunity I can't pass up. I made a commitment to be a true student-athlete, and this is an extension of that commitment.

The reaction to my choice has been very positive. My family, my coaches and the administrators at Florida State all support me. Some people around campus, the fans who are really focused on football, have told me I should play in the game no matter what. But they don't know me real well, and they probably don't understand the significance of this opportunity. With my teammates, some of the guys are supportive, too, telling me how great an honor it is and how I need to pursue it. Some other players are just disappointed that the interview is the same day as the game. No one in the football program has said anything negative. They might be thinking it, but no one has mentioned anything.

The interview starts at 8:30 a.m. Central time and runs until 2 p.m. They make the announcement of the winners later that day, so we're told not to leave Birmingham until 5 p.m. The Maryland game starts at 7:45 p.m. Eastern time, so there's a chance I could make it there for part of the game. (Florida State has contacted companies to charter a flight for Rolle.) We'll have to see how that works out. But the scholarship, and getting to spend next year at Oxford studying medical anthropology, is the most important thing to me right now. It's even a little more important than a division championship.

— As told to Dave Curtis

Myron Rolle is one of 23 college football players who write weekly columns for SN Today. To read more from SN Today's columnists, go to sportingnewstoday.com.



Rolle isn't about to pass on the chance to study at Oxford.

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What We're Watching

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

TEXAS TECH AT OKLAHOMA

Saturday, November 22, 8 p.m. ET (ABC)

With a trip to the Big 12 championship game and national title hopes on the line, everyone is expecting a pass-happy, high-scoring affair with the Red Raiders' Graham Harrell dueling the Sooners' Sam Bradford. OU coach Bob Stoops, however, is worried about the rest of Mike Leach's Tech team: "Mike's offense has always been highly productive, their defense has played well, and it's obvious, too, that their running game has been a big factor."

NFL

TITANS AT LIONS

Thursday, November 27, 12:30 p.m. ET (CBS)

Who cares if it's the NFL's best team taking on the league's worst team—it's still Thanksgiving football, the appetizer in a tripleheader just before you dive into the Turducken. Plus, it's a rare chance to see undefeated vs. winless this late in a season. FOX NFL analyst Jimmy Johnson's take: "The Lions are more liable to go 0-16 than the Titans going 16-0."

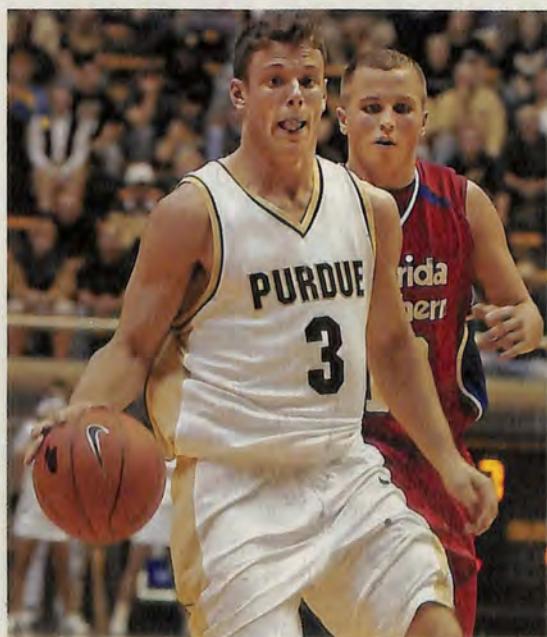
COLLEGE BASKETBALL

DUKE AT PURDUE

Tuesday, December 2, 9 p.m. ET (ESPN)

Along with having Final Four-caliber men's basketball teams this season, both universities have pretty good science programs. So it's no surprise that the teams rank 2-3 in SN expert Mike DeCourcey's "Best Chemistry" top five, with the Boilermakers getting the slight edge because of one versatile player. "It doesn't matter if Chris Kramer plays point guard, shooting guard or palace guard; he's somebody you want on your team."

—Vinnie Iyer



Kramer does the little things that make Purdue a big deal.

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My Profile

(What you won't find on Facebook ... even if you are approved as a friend)

Rick Pitino

Louisville basketball coach

- » **Born:** September 18, 1952, in New York
- » **Status:** Married
- » **Alma mater:** UMass
- » **What's on TV:** ESPN, *Law & Order*. I watch very little television.
- » **What's in my iPod:** The Eagles, Motown. I don't listen to a lot of music.
- » **What I drive:** Silver Lexus Sedan
- » **Favorite flicks:** *On the Waterfront*, *Godfather II*, *Braveheart*
- » **Bookmarks:** I go to the *New York Post* site every day because I get a kick out of the headlines. I pull up espn.com and others regularly as well.
- » **Superstition:** If you say something bad about someone, something bad is going to happen to you.
- » **Worst habit:** Eating standing up
- » **On my office walls:** Pictures of family, friends and former players
- » **Love to trade places for a day with ...** Mickey Mantle. He was my childhood hero. It would have been fun to hit home runs in Yankee Stadium for a day.
- » **First job:** Caddying at Mill River and Pine Hollow Country Club in Long Island. I'd carry two bags for 18 holes and made \$12 a round. Bags back then were like the pro bags, with big leather straps that would just tear the skin off your shoulders, not like the lighter travel bags of today.

- » **For dinner:** Lasagna, ravioli or some kind of pasta dish, but I don't eat them anymore because they're too high in fat and carbohydrates.
- » **Talent I'd most like to have:** To be able to play the piano and sing
- » **Favorite athlete to watch in another sport:** Derek Jeter, because I love his attitude, the way he plays and his professionalism
- » **Favorite value in others:** Generosity
- » **Favorite city to visit:** New York or Miami
- » **Favorite team growing up:** New York Yankees
- » **Dream date:** If I were a single man, it would be Halle Berry.
- » **My greatest love:** My wife, Joanne, and my family
- » **Favorite physical attribute about myself:** I'm not crazy about any of my features.
- » **And least ...** My Italian nose
- » **My bucket list:** I sat down with my family and talked about this. There's really nothing that I would desire to do, except do more things with my family. There's no mountain climbing, safari or other experience that I care to do. I've experienced so much through basketball that I'd just like to repeat the things I've done. Any time spent with family and friends, even if repetitive, is a great time.
- » **My motto:** Treat people the way you want to be treated.

—Jeff D'Alessio

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Sports Biz

What were they thinking?

Tractor's breakdown left the Bucks eating crow

In his 30-plus years in basketball, Bob Weinhauer has had plenty of success. He coached Penn to the Final Four and was the Rockets' G.M. when they traded for Clyde Drexler, a move that led to Houston's second NBA title. Weinhauer, however, presided over one deal he'd rather forget.

He was the Bucks' G.M. when they wanted Robert "Tractor" Traylor so badly they gave the Nos. 9 and 19 picks in the 1998 draft to the Mavericks for their No. 6 pick. Milwaukee got its Tractor. Dallas then landed two players it coveted, Dirk Nowitzki at No. 9 and veteran Steve Nash in a deal with Phoenix.

Donn Nelson was in his first year in Dallas with his dad, Don Nelson, when he helped spearhead the trade.

Nelson: "Instead of just taking Dirk at 6, we made the deal to get Steve. We knew Phoenix wanted two first-round picks (for Nash) and Milwaukee wanted Traylor so badly they would trade up in return for their two first-round picks."

Weinhauer: "Nellie was like a sly fox. He knew we wanted the Tractor, and we knew he wanted Nowitzki. We weren't sure what they would do with the other pick."

Nelson: "We needed the other pick (19) to get Steve, which we sent along with a future first-rounder. I remember Danny (Ainge, then Suns coach) calling me the night before



the draft. When he said they'd do the trade, I felt like doing cartwheels."

Weinhauer: "Tractor, being a Big Ten player, was an instant success with the fans. That first year, he came to camp in great shape and he did everything right. Nowitzki looked like what our scouts from Europe said: slow and having trouble scoring against good defenses."

Nelson: "We felt good about the trade that night, but the next two years proved to be painful. I remember my dad looking at me, like, 'Son, what have you gotten me into?'"

Weinhauer: "The second year, Tractor came in a little heavy, and his shot wasn't going down. ... Nowitzki,

Don Nelson had reason to smile when he brought Nowitzki and Nash to the Mavericks on the same draft night.

meanwhile, just kept getting better and better and better."

"I'll be accountable. I was the general manager. I could have stood up and said, absolutely not (on drafting Traylor). But that's not what happened. It looks like a really bad trade, and in retrospect, it was not one of the better ones."

— Stan McNeal

Leach's deal will be about more than money, but there will be plenty of that involved

He's the hottest coaching candidate in college football. His contract is running out, and he could be swayed to leave Texas Tech for the right opportunity.

But it's about more than money with Mike Leach, who makes \$1.75 million a year at Tech and after this magical season could command as much as \$2.5 million a year from a heavy-hitting BCS school such as Tennessee or Washington.

Leach's eccentric ways—he's liable to show up at the university president's house for dinner in khakis and flip-flops—may sway search committees as much as his thrill-a-minute offense. His contract is up after the 2010 season, and Tech athletic director Gerald Myers says he wants to restructure the deal after this season.

Sources say Myers wants a backloaded deal, one that would pay the coach a

specific amount—likely in the multiple millions—should he stay the entire length of the contract. If Leach agrees to an extension at Tech, he likely will be the fourth Big 12 coach (Bob Stoops, Mack Brown, Mark Mangino) to make at least \$2 million a year, and he could get much more. The longer the Tennessee and Washington jobs stay open, the more bargaining power Leach will have.

— Matt Hayes

REPORT

• Less than three years after announcing that it would become a worldwide Olympic partner, Johnson & Johnson has decided not to extend its sponsorship.

• Fantasy sports players significantly outspend the general population in many leading product categories, according to new research commissioned by the Fantasy Sports Association.

• The MLB Players Association is now requiring agents to consult with the union before they negotiate contracts for arbitration-eligible players. The move comes as some veteran agents have complained that other agents have agreed to long-term below-market deals in order to secure client fees for themselves.

• Stats LLC has struck a multiyear deal with Google to have real-time sports scores and data available within the Internet powerhouse's search engine as well as iGoogle, the company's personalized home page offering.

• CBS College Sports has reached deals with Comcast, Bright House and Verizon that will expand its distribution to 29 million homes. Its lead rival, ESPNU, is in about 28 million homes.

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Mike Leach

NOWITZKI: CAROLYN HERTER / GETTY IMAGES; TRAYLOR: TED JACOBSON / GETTY IMAGES; LEACH: MATT SLOCUM / AP

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The
eyes -
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THE TEXAS



By Steve Greenberg

Whether it's to spot a receiver downfield or overcome a devastating loss, Colt McCoy always looks straight ahead. That's why, for the Longhorns and their quarterback, the best is yet to come.

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GOOD **YEAR**
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They say the eyes are windows to the soul, and never was that truer than on first-and-10 from the Texas 41, late in the second quarter against Missouri. Colt McCoy took a shotgun snap and immediately sensed a Tigers pass rusher bearing down on his blind side. He was rolling right, futilely, it seemed, when Tommy Chavis ran him down and tomahawked the ball out of McCoy's right hand. But the play was only getting started. Without looking down, McCoy scooped up the ball on the run and, a split second before Chavis drilled him to the turf, contorted his body and rifled it over the middle to Quan Cosby for a 23-yard gain.

There was but one way this could happen. Says McCoy: "I just kept my eyes downfield."

It's simple. Colt McCoy doesn't blink, and the only direction he looks is forward.

It was true in offseason workouts, when McCoy bench-pressed 225 pounds 16 times—twice as many as he had the previous spring—and, for the first time, squatted over 400, power-cleaned over 300 and, despite gaining 10 pounds, improved his 40-yard dash time from 4.74 seconds to 4.6. "He worked as hard as I've ever seen anybody work," says Longhorns coach Mack Brown.

It was true in the dog days of summer, when McCoy toolled around campus and picked up any stragglers who hadn't promised to show up for informal 7-on-7 passing drills. "He always came and got me if I needed a ride," says sophomore wide receiver Brandon Collins. "Sometimes I stayed at his house (the night before). He's a great leader for this team."

It was true in fall camp, when McCoy said, simply, of Texas' perceived also-ran status in the Big 12—and of his own also-ran status behind Oklahoma's Sam Bradford and Missouri's Chase Daniel, among others—"I plan on having a great year."

In the season opener against Florida Atlantic, McCoy threw his weight around, mocking Owls coach Howard Schnellenberger's stated threat that his team would punish what he saw as a vulnerable offense. In the fourth game against Rice, McCoy blew up two defenders at the goal line on an 8-yard scoring run, putting both on their backs in a massive collision. "We watched the highlight reel on Sunday," says center Chris Hall. "Wow! We were all yelling and screaming."



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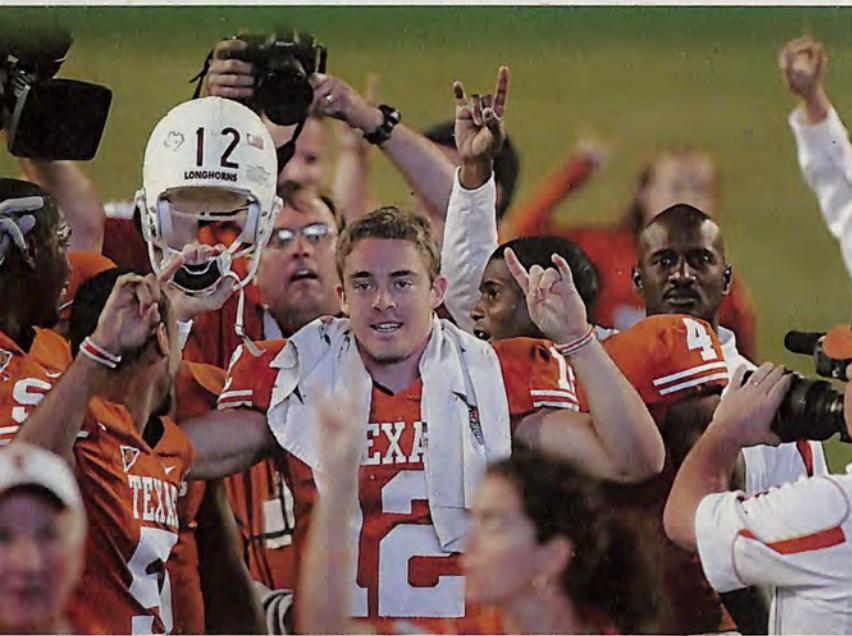
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McCoy has hooked 'em, becoming a team and fan favorite despite following a legend.

And as the Longhorns prepared to embark on a four-game midseason hell march that could have damned them until 2009—Oklahoma, Missouri, Oklahoma State and Texas Tech—their 22-year-old junior quarterback fired up his game to a level no one had imagined possible. On the Wednesday before Texas left for Dallas to face the No. 1 Sooners, McCoy tore up practice by throwing 50 passes, offensive coordinator Greg Davis estimates, many of them against a live defense, without the ball touching the ground once. “Never seen that before,” Davis says.

What McCoy is doing this season, well, it has never been done—not at Texas, not anywhere. He has completed 77.2 percent of his passes, ahead of the NCAA record pace. He shot down Bradford and Daniel—and undefeated Oklahoma State a week later—and was brilliant in a last-second loss to Texas Tech in Lubbock. Every significant Texas passing record will fall this season. The Heisman Trophy may well greet him in December, but McCoy’s eyes are on the national championship prize.

“Winning,” he says, “it’s the only thing I care about.”

FROM KID QB TO TEAM LEADER

As a redshirt freshman starter in 2006, McCoy’s eyes were always downfield. That’s because his coaches wouldn’t let the offense huddle up; they didn’t want him looking at the returning starters from a national title team and pretending to be their leader. As Brown tells it, “If he would’ve gone into the huddle and yelled at (guard) Kasey Studdard, Kasey would’ve whupped him.”

“They all looked up to Vince Young,” Brown says. “He was their leader, he was the tough guy, he was the funny guy, he was the guy who said, ‘Studdard, shut up, I’m not putting up with that.’ He was the guy who said, ‘Hey, (tackle Justin) Blalock, pay attention.’ And then all the sudden Colt goes in, and they’re saying, ‘Where’s Vince?’”

McCoy admits he “definitely was intimidated” at first by some of his teammates—particularly his

Young or McCoy? It's not so easy to pick

Remember Chris Simms vs. Major Applewhite? Texas offensive coordinator Greg Davis says of the nearly 10-year-old quarterback controversy, “Major used to laugh. If he threw a touchdown pass, it was a great read. If Simms threw a touchdown pass, it was a great throw. The truth is, those two guys were more similar than the public perceived it, just because one of them was 6-4 and blond and had a big arm.”

The physical differences between Colt McCoy (6-3, 210) and his one-of-a-kind predecessor, Vince Young (6-5, 233), are similarly stark. But if Simms-Applewhite seems forever ago, it’s because Young and McCoy have shoved it into the recesses of our memories. Make no mistake, they are the two best Longhorns QBs since the great Bobby Layne.

Who gets the nod between the two of them? Has to be Young for delivering the 2005 national title, right? According to Davis’ list of the four most important qualities in a QB—interestingly, arm strength doesn’t make the list—the coach makes a compelling case for a young Colt.



VINCE YOUNG

Davis doesn’t give Young a ringing endorsement, offering a more general take: “The great quarterbacks are all accurate, and V.Y. was a great quarterback.”

“He had a presence about him, and the kids fed off it. He was a big guy. He was a fun guy. He’d walk into the locker room, ‘Hey, baby, what’s going on? Crank that music up.’ There was a certain relaxation he brought to the team.”

“On the field before the (2005 title) game, I hadn’t smiled for two days. Vince walked up and said, ‘It’s all good, Coach.’ He wasn’t worried about USC. Nobody scared him.”

“Vince obviously is a cut above anybody else because of being a 1,000-yard rusher. Nobody made plays with his feet like Vince did.”

COLT McCLOY

How’s this for definitive: “Colt is the most accurate quarterback I’ve ever coached. He’s got the best balance of any quarterback I’ve ever coached.”

1 Accuracy

“He is a tremendous worker in practice, in the weight room, in summer workouts. In our business, you’d say he’s the whole ball of wax. He represents the university well in all phases on the field and off the field.”

2 Leadership

“He’s taken a lot of hits—a lot of hits—but he hasn’t missed a start. We might need him to be a little more careful when he runs the ball. He’s a tough guy.”

3 Toughness (mental and physical)

“There’s times a blitz is coming and you can’t step forward or else you’ll get (hammered). Colt can throw off his back foot, flip the ball, whatever.”

4 Ability to improvise

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Graham Harrell



When it comes to QBs, Texas isn't a lone star state

Texas Tech quarterbacks have thrown for 44,474 yards—about 25 miles—during the Mike Leach era. They could throw for hundreds more miles without shortening the distance between them and that team from Austin in terms of statewide popularity.

But, from a national perspective, the Red Raiders have encroached upon the Longhorns in 2008 in the most meaningful of ways. Not only did Tech's 39-33 victory over UT in Lubbock alter the national championship picture for both teams, it also gave Tech quarterback Graham Harrell a decisive (albeit unsafe) lead over Colt McCoy in the race for the Heisman Trophy.

Harrell is simply the best quarterback Tech has ever had. He already has blown away most of Kliff Kingsbury's school passing records, and with another 273 yards at Oklahoma on November 22, he'll move into second place, behind Hawaii's Timmy Chang, on the NCAA's all-time passing yardage list.

"He deserves any attention he gets," says McCoy. "He's a great quarterback and a really good guy."

Harrell's 28-yard touchdown pass to Michael Crabtree to beat Texas was the biggest play of the 2008 college football season. Many in the national media predicted Tech would let down its guard against one-loss Oklahoma State the following Saturday, but Harrell responded by completing 40 of 50 passes for 456 yards and six TDs in a 56-20 win.

Asked after that game what it was like to withstand such an assault, Cowboys safety Ricky Price shook his head in awe. "He was on fire the whole game," Price said.

Harrell has been on fire for three years but especially over the course of Tech's 12-game winning streak, dating back to the 2007 regular-season finale, a 34-27 upset of Oklahoma. The Sooners entered that game gunning for a national championship, as they are again. But the Red Raiders were unranked last season. If they could do it then, why can't they do it now?

"Being 10-0 is great," Harrell says, "but we want to go 12-0. That's our goal."

In the end, those are the only numbers that really matter.

—Steve Greenberg

live-wire, NFL-bound protectors on the offensive line—and his reticence manifest itself in a variety of ways. Before camp started that summer, when players didn't show up for informal 7-on-7s, McCoy said nothing. During games, when Davis gave him the chance to choose plays in timeouts, McCoy deferred.

But McCoy's teammates responded to his play—a school-record 29 touchdown passes, a 161.8 passer rating and 10 wins in 13 starts—sooner, and more definitively, than perhaps his coaches realized. "On the first play of the first game (a 56-7 win over North Texas), you could tell he was nervous right there," says Studdard, now a Houston Texans guard. "But after that game, we all looked at each other and said, 'We've got something here.' He and Vince are the two best quarterbacks there to date. I put them in the same category as leaders and always doing whatever it takes to win."

Says Blalock, a starting guard with the Falcons: "His play did the talking for him. He was always in the film room, in the study room, always out throwing to receivers. The toughest thing was the way he looked. He still looks like he's 15 years old."

When McCoy was 15, he was a sophomore, preparing to start at quarterback for Jim Ned High School in Tuscola, Texas: population 700, plus one stoplight. Brad McCoy, the team's coach, says his devout Christian son rallied the team with a simple approach: "Here's the way I'm gonna live, here's the way I'm gonna play."

It was Colt's dream to be a Longhorn. Even when it appeared he was being recruited to be the backup to Ryan Perrilloux, who was among the nation's top-ranked high school quarterbacks, that didn't change. "Colt committed as soon as we asked him," Brown says. "Everybody was calling and telling him, 'Perrilloux's coming, don't go, don't go,' but he never blinked. He said, 'I don't mind the competition.'"

McCoy was taken aback by Austin at first—"meeting people from all kinds of ethnic backgrounds," he says, "finding my way around in this huge city, no dirt roads, playing football for UT ... it was hard to get a grasp on things"—but he clicked right away with Young.

"I was impressed that he was always asking questions, wanting to know how I did things or what I'd done as a freshman," Young recalls. "I encouraged him to keep asking questions to me (and) to stay in (Davis') ear and keep learning."

McCoy's sophomore season brought the first real comeuppance of his football life. He threw for 3,303 yards and again won 10 games, but the season was marred by his 18 interceptions and at least as many nagging injuries. On the first count, McCoy says he was overcompensating for all the NFL had taken from Texas' offense the previous June. "I was trying to make big plays instead of just playing the game," he says. "If you just play, big plays are going to happen. They're built into the game plan."

On the second count, McCoy's aching body was sending a clear message. "I was going to get in the best shape I've ever been in," he says. "I wanted to be the best that I could be, and I wasn't going to settle for anything less than that. The thing that really lit my fire was losing three games. That's the worst. I can't stand to lose."

A LOSS—BUT NOT A LOST SEASON

Texas Tech 39, Texas 33. Goodbye, perfect season, No. 1 ranking and, maybe, that national title shot and Heisman Trophy. Oh, well: McCoy walked into the locker room the next day and "put a smile on my face," he says. "I told the guys, 'Be happy.' It was hard, but we're not done yet. Everything is still in front of us."

McCoy ran for his life in Lubbock. His receivers dropped seven passes. A vicious third quarter hit tore his upper labial frenulum—the tissue that connects his upper lip to his gums. On the sideline, a trainer reached into McCoy's mouth and removed it. Then McCoy gathered the Longhorns, down by 16, and said, "We can win this game."

They came so close. On their last drive of the third quarter, McCoy huddled with Davis during a timeout. Davis presented him with options, and McCoy—as he first did in his next-to-last game as a sophomore—made a decisive call. Send Cosby on what Davis calls a "runaway slant," McCoy said, and the Red Raiders would follow him. They did,



McCoy has full command of the huddle these days, but that wasn't always the case.

THE HIGHLIGHT ZONE

SPORTING NEWS PROMOTIONS AND PRODUCT NEWS



McCoy took a beating against Texas Tech but still led a fantastic comeback.

and McCoy hit Malcolm Williams on the other side of the field for a 37-yard touchdown.

McCoy has become a leader in every sense of the word, if he wasn't all along. When his teammates asked him to autograph a copy of *Sports Illustrated* after the Oklahoma game, McCoy looked at himself on the cover and threw the magazine in the trash. "I don't want any of that right now," he told them. "I just want to play."

But he is more than a football player. He spent his 2008 spring break doing mission work along the Amazon River in Peru. He has been grieving since April, when his cousin and lifelong companion, Grant Hinds, a former U.S. Marine who did three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, died after a car accident. McCoy and his roommate, star wide receiver Jordan Shipley, are fixtures at Austin's Westover Hills Church of Christ. Once a week, Brown says, McCoy texts his coach with a message such as, "Thanks for being who you are."

"We know he's a great football player," Brad McCoy says, "but he's an even better young man. He makes his parents proud. I've been fortunate to be his high school coach, to see him develop on that stage, and his dad. It's so humbling and gratifying to see his potential in every way."

He is the apple of their eye and the soul of the Longhorns. And forward he goes, with even better days surely ahead.

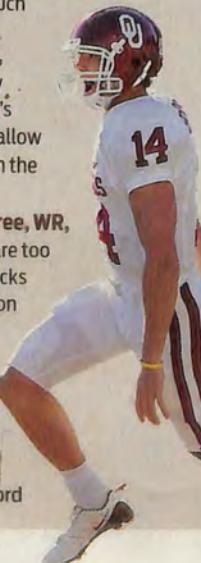
Ranking the Heisman contenders

Texas' loss to Texas Tech cost Colt McCoy his front-runner status, but with two weeks left in the regular season, who knows what could happen?

- **1. Graham Harrell, QB, Texas Tech.** The "system quarterback" label and a teammate in the race could be too much to overcome.
- **2. Colt McCoy, QB, Texas.** He has terrific numbers and means more to his team than anyone in the race—but he has been dinged because Texas' defense couldn't stop Texas Tech.
- **3. Tim Tebow, QB, Florida.** His late push has been impressive, but early injuries/struggles left too much ground to make up.
- **4. Sam Bradford, QB, Oklahoma.** Any other year, Bradford's huge season would allow him to run away with the award.
- **5. Michael Crabtree, WR, Texas Tech.** There are too many hot quarterbacks (the Heisman position of choice) ahead of the best individual player in the game.

— Matt Hayes

Sam Bradford



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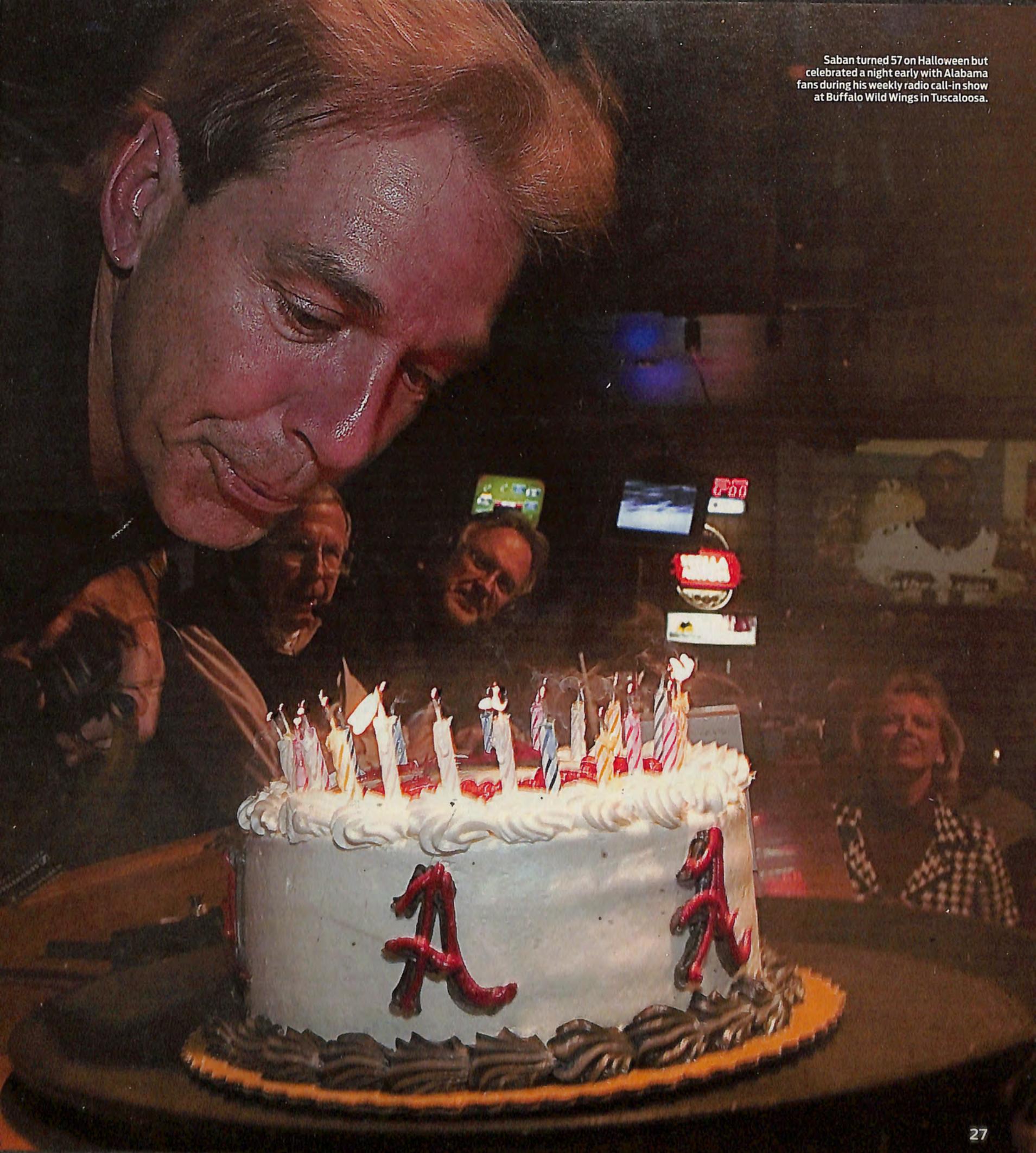
**ALL-
ACCESS: ALABAMA**

CLIFFTON

A WISH COME TRUE

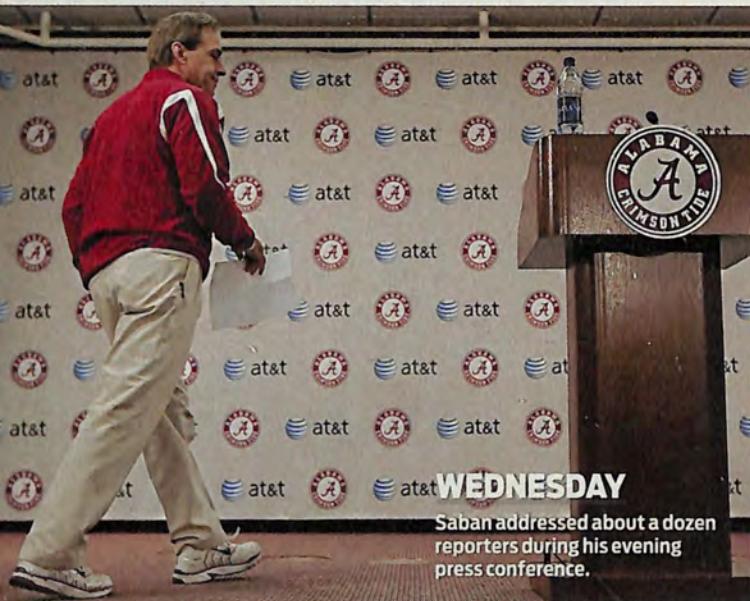
Nick Saban has taken the Tide to the top faster than anyone could have expected. *Sporting News* spent the better part of a week along for the ride with the No. 1 team in college football.

Photos by Bob Leverone / SN



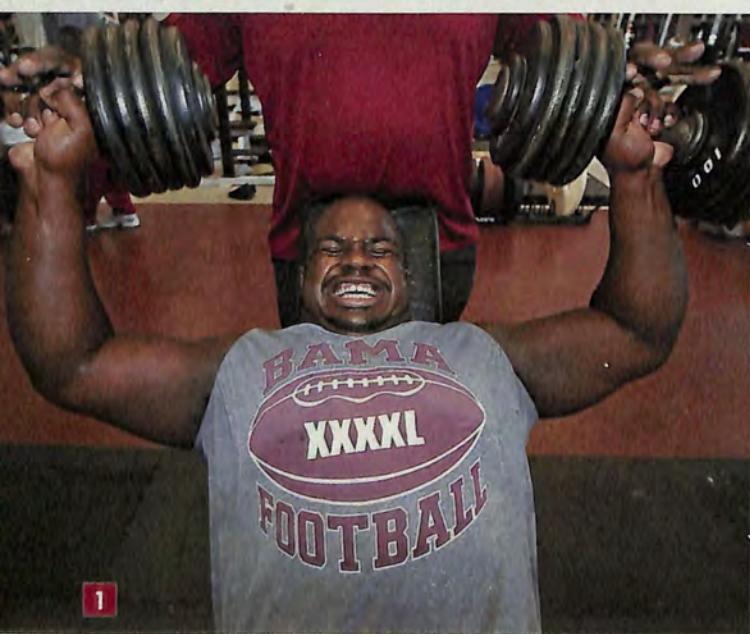
Saban turned 57 on Halloween but celebrated a night early with Alabama fans during his weekly radio call-in show at Buffalo Wild Wings in Tuscaloosa.

ALL-ACCESS: ALABAMA



WEDNESDAY

Saban addressed about a dozen reporters during his evening press conference.



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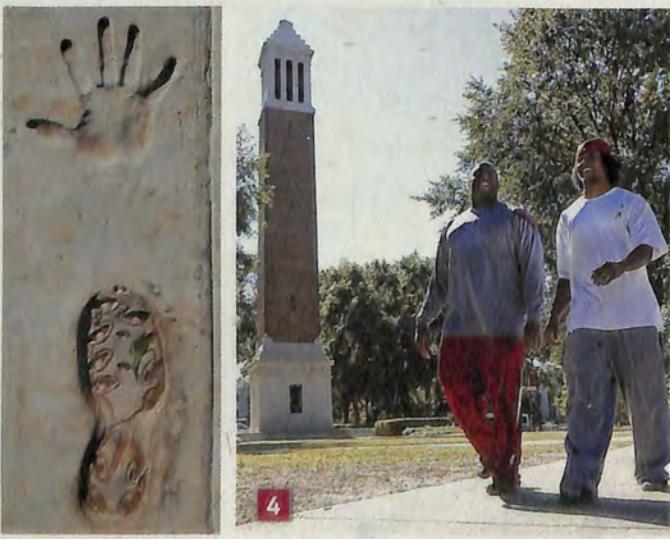
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THURSDAY

1 Weight work starts at 8 a.m. at the Mal M. Moore Athletic Facility. Sophomore defensive lineman Josh Chapman lifts more before 9 a.m. than most people do all day.

2 Saban hears a lot of opinions in his daily coaches meeting. When his staff gets together, it makes for a full room.

3 The Tide give back to the community. Junior defensive back Ali Sharrieff mentors fourth- and fifth-grade boys at Woodland Forrest Elementary, and the kids light up in his presence.

4 The Tide loom large on campus, but not as large as Denny Chimes, the school's iconic bell tower that was dedicated in 1929. Senior co-captains offensive lineman Antoine Caldwell (left) and defensive back Rashad Johnson strolled past the monument, a few steps away from the football captains walk of fame, which bears hand and foot impressions of each captain from Crimson Tide teams dating back to the 1940s.

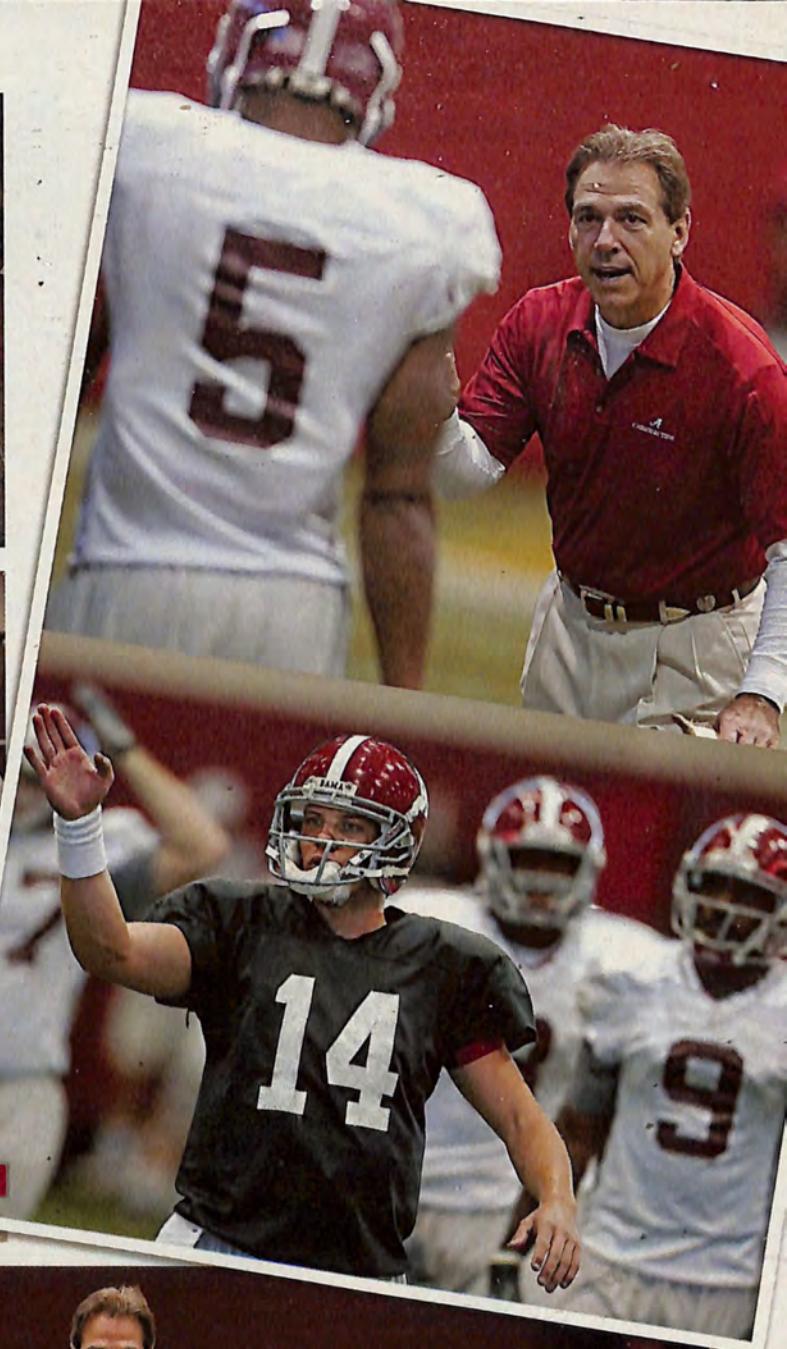
5 Defensive tackle Terrence Cody couldn't practice, but that doesn't mean he didn't work hard. He rehabbed his injured MCL with some water resistance training. Cody missed two games but returned for the Tide's win over LSU.



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6 It's not all work being No. 1. Defensive lineman Lorenzo Washington (left) and defensive back Wesley Neighbors found time for some pingpong while teammates enjoyed a little TV on the three flat screens in the team's players lounge.

7 Tape 'em if you got 'em. Linebacker Cory Reamer (front) and his teammates are taped by the training staff before every practice. The team goes through about 200 rolls of tape per practice.

8 Saban spends most of his practice words on the defense but is happy to offer a little direction when an offensive player, such as junior running back Roy Upchurch, needs it. Senior quarterback John Parker Wilson (14) is another source of direction for the offense.

9 The Tide took to the Hank Crisp Indoor Facility for their Thursday practice, which is closed to the media. Saban delivered his postpractice speech with his signature straw hat in hand. The hat is the same one the coach wore when the team started practice in August, and there hasn't been a reason to mess with success. One other Saban superstition: He gets a good luck penny from his daughter before every game.

ALL-ACCESS: ALABAMA



FRIDAY

1 Quarterback John Parker Wilson and his dad, Parker, share a breakfast at The Waysider the Friday after every Tide victory. The Waysider has been seeing plenty of the Wilsons this season.

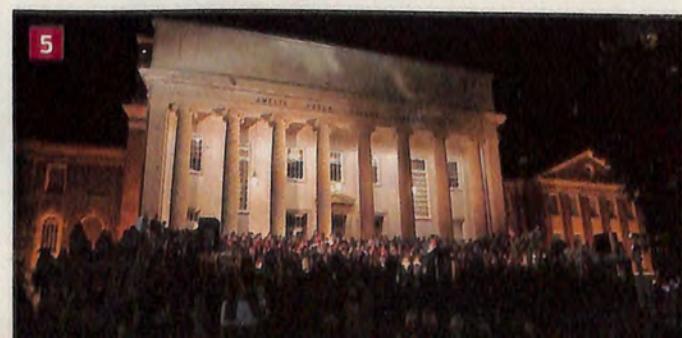
2 The afternoon before the game, it's time to make the crimson on the helmets shine just right. Student trainer Matt Sweatman added a little polish.

3 No suit, no service? The night before home games, the sharp-dressed Tide stay at Hotel Capstone

across from the Mal M. Moore Athletic Facility. Saban, joined by (from left) Rashad Johnson, Antoine Caldwell and John Parker Wilson, led the team from campus to Capstone.

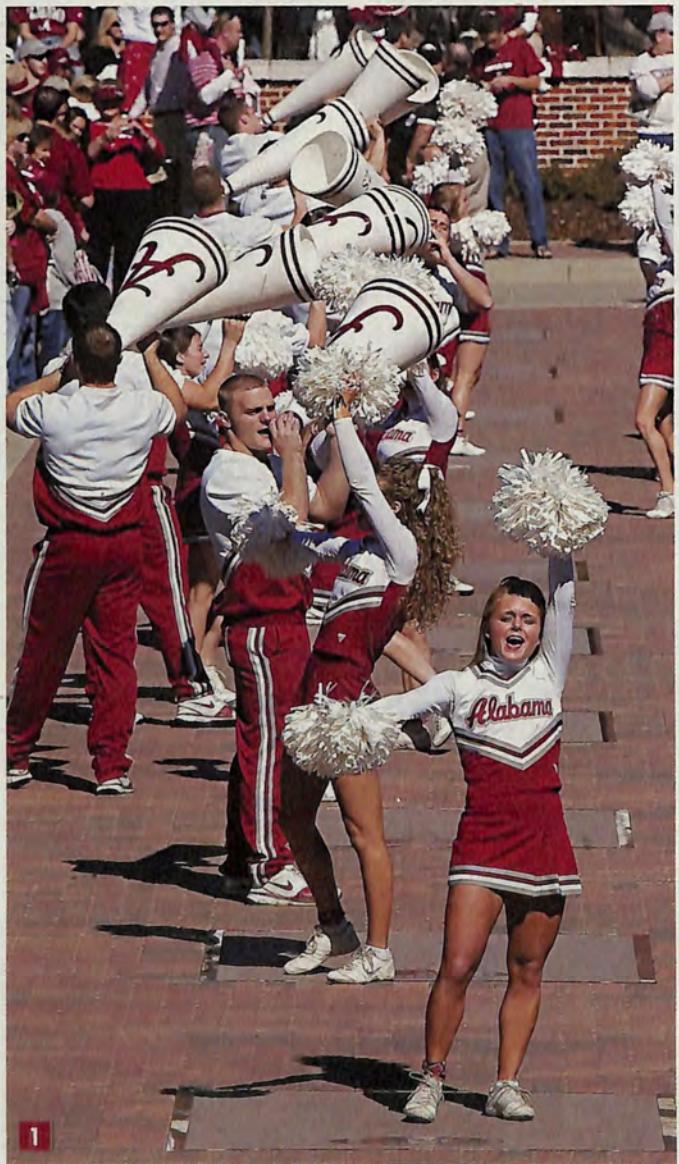
4 Dinner at Hotel Capstone is served at 6:15 p.m. sharp. On the menu: filet mignon, boneless chicken breast, meat lasagna, macaroni and cheese, spaghetti and plenty of sides.

5 All is well on campus. The school's Million Dollar Band kept the masses entertained at a homecoming pep rally outside Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library.

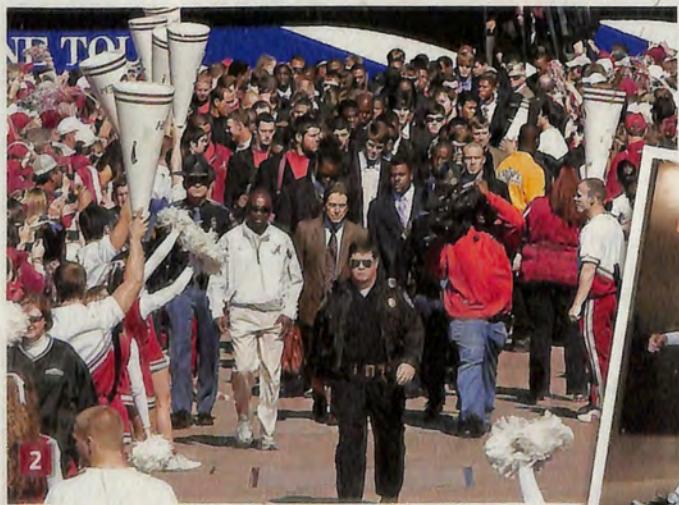


SATURDAY

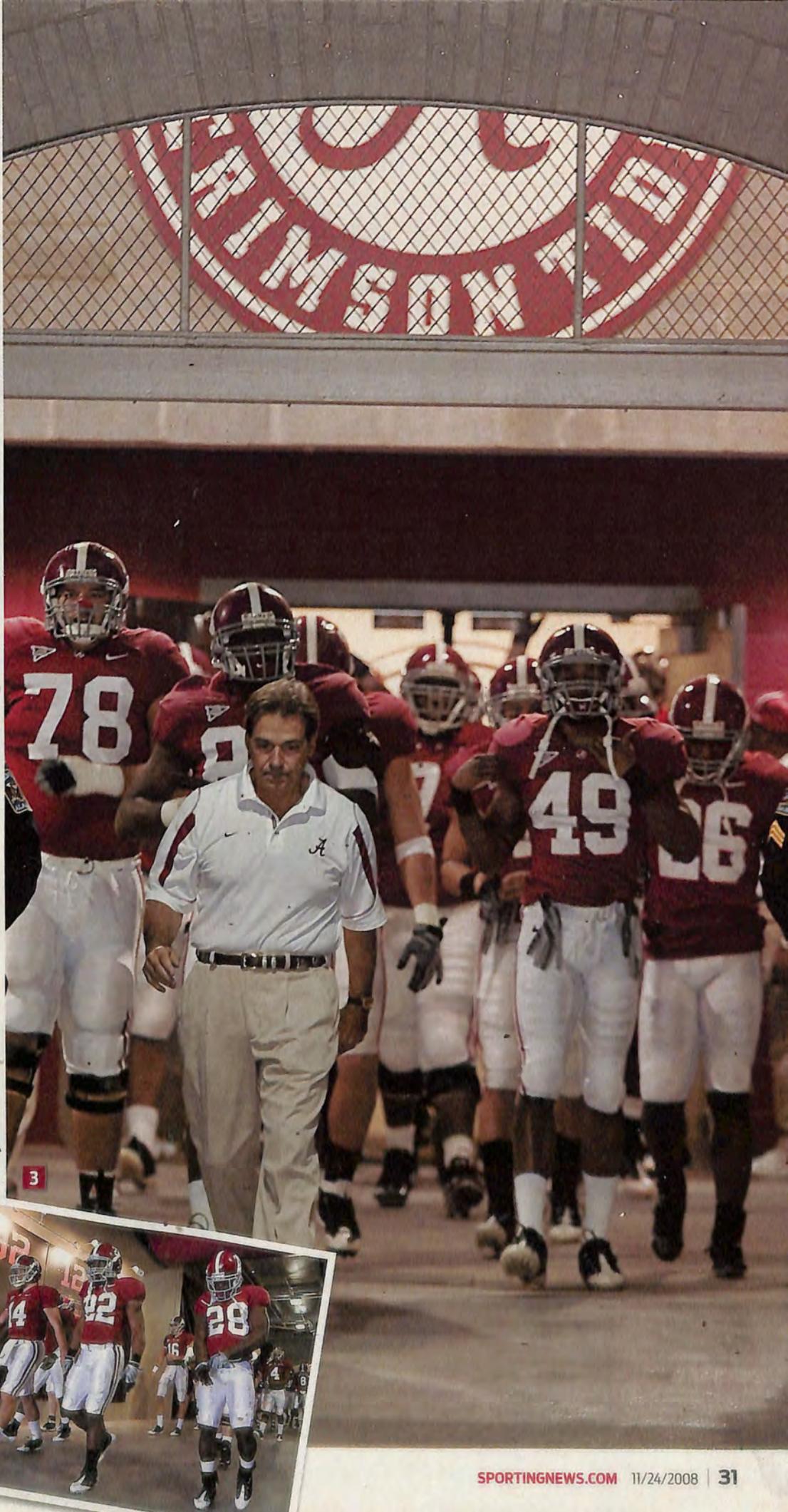
- 1 Which way to the stadium? The cheerleaders show the way.
- 2 They call it the Walk of Champions, and why not? The No. 1 team in the land rolled into Bryant-Denny with an 8-0 record.
- 3 Tunnel vision: Saban is all business as he leads his team to the field for warmups.



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ALL-ACCESS: ALABAMA

SATURDAY

4 You know things are going well with your program when 92,138 folks show up to watch you beat up on Arkansas State. For most of the crowd—including the sorority girls honoring the tradition of showing a little leg along the stadium wall—this was a lazy Saturday in Tuscaloosa.

5 Rashad Johnson scored the second of the Tide's five touchdowns on a 32-yard interception return in the second quarter.

6 Yes, Evan Cardwell, the fourth quarter is yours. Don't be so greedy—the first three were yours, too.

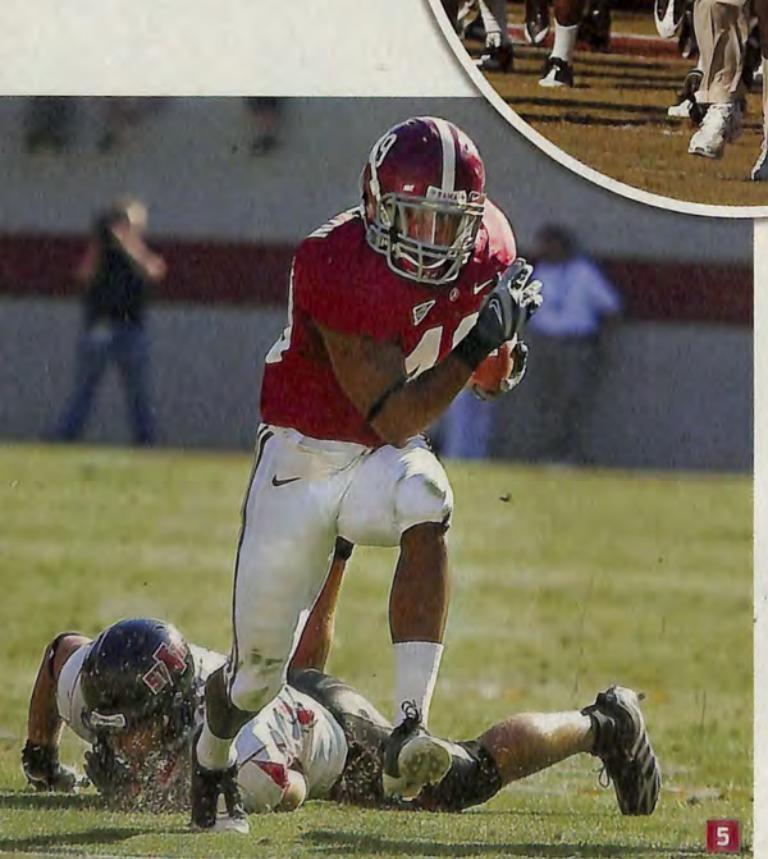
7 After a 35-0 win, Saban urged his players to continue to compete against themselves: "You have to ask yourself, whether we win or lose, if you improved as a football player."

8 There were plenty of handshakes to go around. Sophomore defensive lineman Milton Talbert (left) is a backup on an Alabama defense that held Arkansas State to 158 total yards.

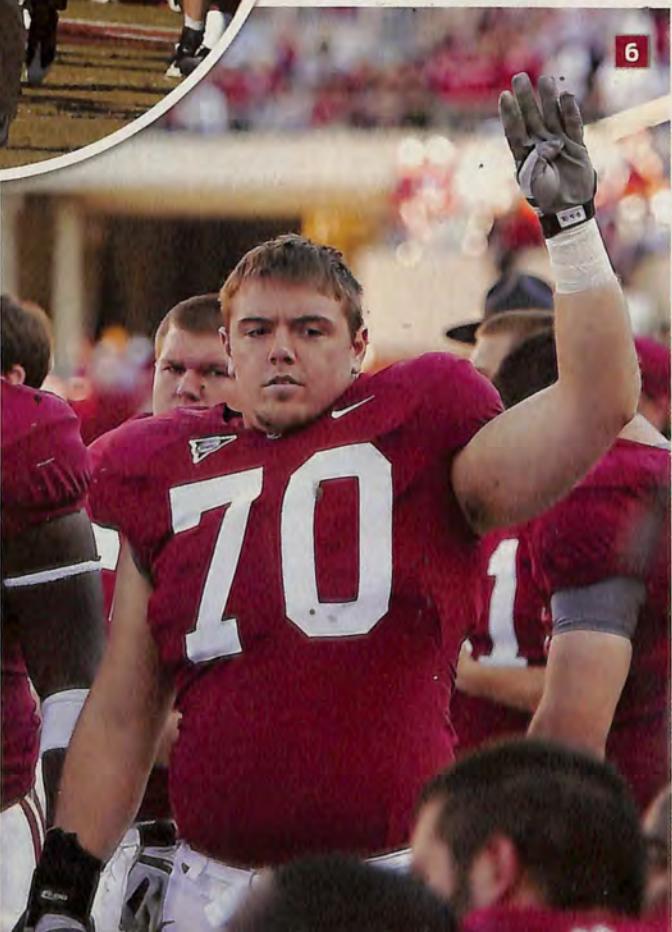
9 The coach of the No. 1 team in the country earned himself a slice of postgame Little Caesars.



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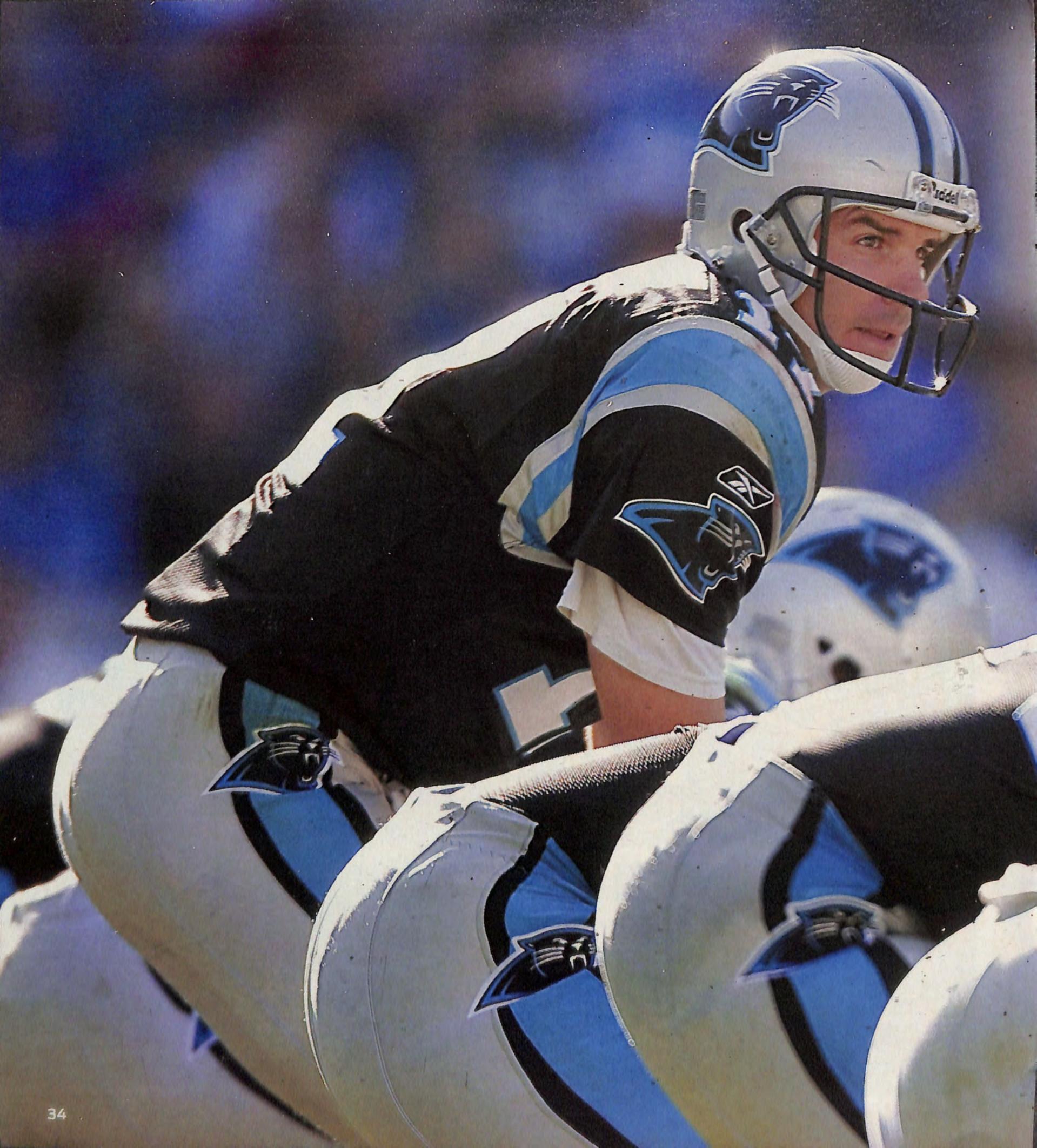
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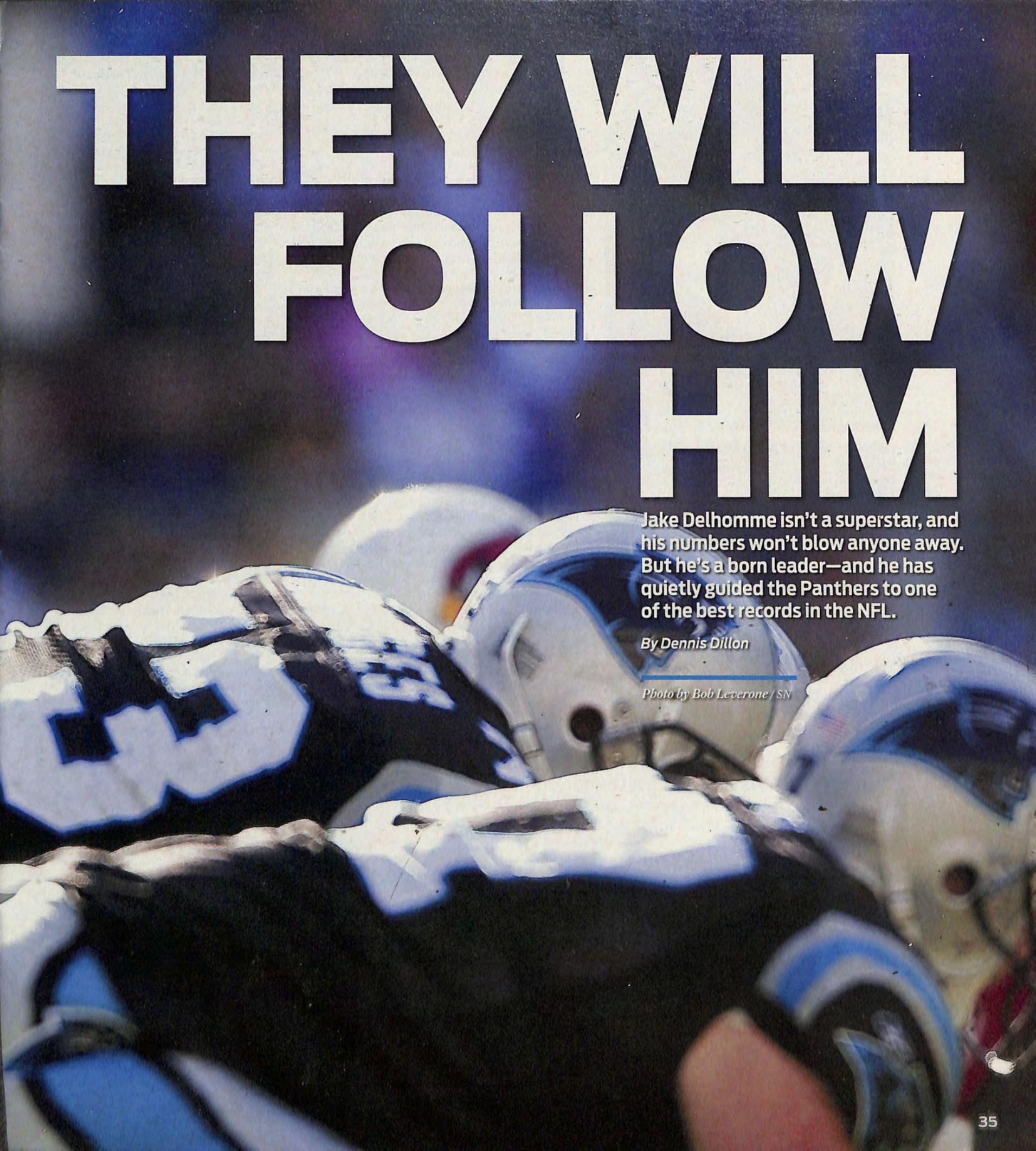
SUNDAY

There's nothing like a Little Debbie Oatmeal Creme Pie. Saban loves them, and it's no surprise they were part of his day-after-a-win breakfast. Bacon was also on the menu when Saban and his wife, Terry, invited a recruit and some Alabama coaches into their home. After the visit, Saban and Terry headed off to church.





THEY WILL FOLLOW HIM

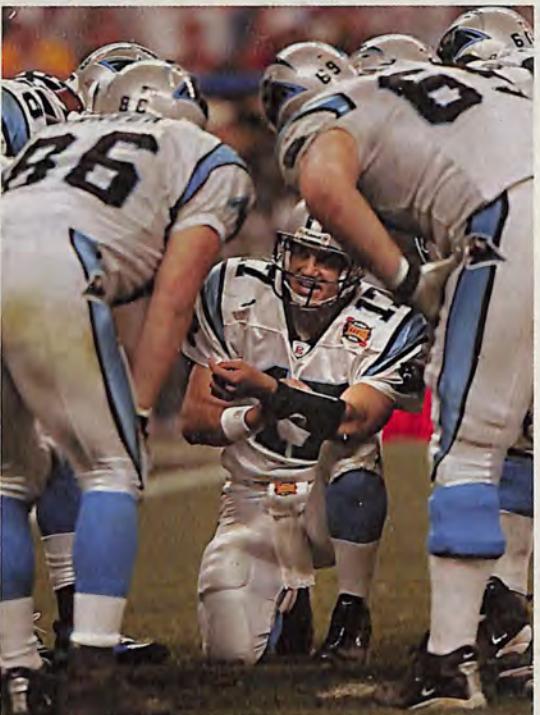


Jake Delhomme isn't a superstar, and his numbers won't blow anyone away. But he's a born leader—and he has quietly guided the Panthers to one of the best records in the NFL.

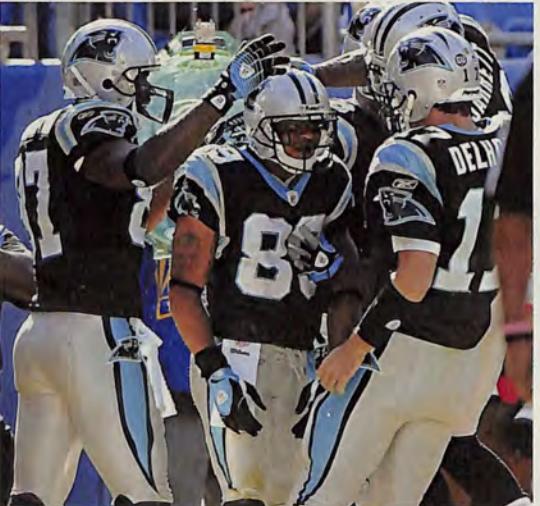
By Dennis Dillon

Photo by Bob Leverone / SN

When Delhomme runs the huddle, "there's only one voice. All of them listen to him."



Muhammad (left), Smith (center) and Delhomme couldn't wait to play together again.



A bad year for QBs—except for Delhomme

Eleven quarterbacks were picked in the 1997 NFL draft, and not one remains in the league. How Delhomme, an undrafted free agent, stacks up against his classmates:

Player, drafting team	Round-overall pick	Years in league	G	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD	Int.	Rating
1 Jim Druckenmiller, 49ers	1-26	1997-99	6	21	52	40.4	239	1	4	29.2
2 Jake Plummer, Cardinals	2-42	1997-2006	143	2,484	4,350	57.1	29,253	161	161	74.6
3 Danny Wuerffel, Saints	4-99	1997-2002	25	184	350	52.6	2,123	12	22	56.4
4 Pat Barnes, Chiefs	4-110	1997-99	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
5 Mike Cherry, Giants	6-171	1997-2000	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	39.6
6 Chuck Clements, Jets	6-191	1997-98	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
7 Tony Graziani, Falcons	7-204	1997-2000	17	85	174	48.9	999	2	8	51.4
8 Koy Detmer, Eagles	7-207	1997-2006	103	184	354	52.0	1,944	10	14	61.2
9 Wally Richardson, Ravens	7-234	1997-99	1	1	2	50.0	1	0	0	56.3
10 Tony Corbin, Chargers	7-237	—	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
11 Ronnie McAda, Packers	7-240	—	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Jake Delhomme*		1998-2008	80	1,363	2,297	59.3	16,535	111	78	83.5

*Through Week 11.

Jake Delhomme couldn't move his Cajun finger fast enough as news of Muhsin Muhammad's release by the Bears scrolled across his TV screen in Breaux Bridge, La., on that February day.

The Panthers quarterback was rehabbing from surgery for a torn ligament in his right elbow, an injury that forced him to miss most of the 2007 season. He hadn't thrown a football since September and didn't know how his arm would respond when he did. But the only thing he wanted to do right at that moment was recruit.

Picking up his cell phone, Delhomme dialed up Muhammad, his old passing partner in Carolina. For two hours he tried and tried, but no one answered—at one point he called teammate Steve Smith to make sure he had the correct number—and he couldn't leave a message because the mailbox was full.

"I figured if I kept on aggravating, sooner or later they were going to have to answer," Delhomme says.

Finally, he got through to Muhammad's wife.

"Hello."

"Put Moose on the phone."

"Who's this?"

"This is Jake."

Laughing, Christa Muhammad handed the phone to her husband.

"How's your arm?" Muhammad asked.

"Don't worry about me," Delhomme said. "You better bring your butt home."

Retelling the story recently in the Panthers' locker room at Bank of America Stadium, Muhammad said, "That's Jake's personality. I was ready to head back to Carolina." Nine days after the call from Delhomme, Muhammad re-signed with the Panthers, the team he had played for from 1996 through 2004.

Whether it's directing the offense on a last-minute game-winning drive, as he did in the season opener at San Diego, taking a player aside on the practice field and instructing him on the nuances of a new play, pulling pranks in the locker room (if you're sitting in a bathroom stall, watch out for a bucket of cold

water) or calling a former teammate and commanding him to return, Delhomme plays his role to the hilt.

He is a leader.

"Oh, no question," says backup quarterback Josh McCown. "I think guys love to see him out there. And they want to play hard because they know they're getting everything Jake has."

"The big thing is the respect the coaches and players have for him," says offensive coordinator Jeff Davidson. "When he stands in that huddle, there's only one voice. All of them listen to him."

"If I could use these terms," says Muhammad, "I would say he is the espresso shot in a great cup of coffee. He motivates our team. He energizes us."

Delhomme has invigorated the Panthers since the opening game of the 2003 season. With Carolina trailing the Jaguars, 17-0, early in the third quarter, he replaced starter Rodney Peete and led the Panthers to a 24-23 comeback victory punctuated by his three touchdown passes—the last a 12-yarder to Ricky Proehl with 16 seconds left. Delhomme started the final 15 games that season as the Panthers compiled an 11-5 record and advanced to Super Bowl 38, where Delhomme and Muhammad collaborated on an 85-yard scoring pass—the longest play from scrimmage in a Super Bowl—but Carolina lost to New England in the final seconds.

A Louisiana native, Delhomme delights with his Acadian French accent but rarely dazzles with his statistics. He's never mentioned in a conversation about the league's premier quarterbacks (frankly, he doesn't care) and rarely is among the league leaders in yardage or touchdowns or passer rating. He has been selected to only one Pro Bowl.

But these are the numbers that matter most: 45-28. That's the Panthers' regular-season record with Delhomme as their starting quarterback. And these: 5-2. That's their playoff record with him.

"Playing against him all these years, I've gained a lot of respect for him," Bucs linebacker Derrick Brooks says. "His value to them is (incalculable) in that they're a more confident offense when he's playing. They're a different team when he's not in there."

After Delhomme got hurt last season, the Panthers rode a quarterback carousel (David Carr, Vinny Testaverde, Matt Moore) to a 7-9 season. This year, they lead the NFC South and have the NFL's third-best record (8-2), trailing only the Titans and Giants.

"I've always placed a premium on the intangibles at that position because I think that guy has to be a leader," says Panthers coach John Fox. "He has to walk into that huddle and deal with pressure during the games. ... When Jake's been healthy, he's done well. He's been that guy."

THE LONG ROAD TO STARDOM

Delhomme took the road less traveled to the NFL. Despite putting up prodigious passing numbers at Louisiana-Lafayette, where he was the only true freshman to start for a Division I-A school in 1993, he was not one of the 11 quarterbacks selected in the 1997 draft. He wasn't even invited to the NFL Scouting Combine.

He worked out for a regional scout from the Dolphins and attended a tryout held by the Saints—"Louisiana Day"—in March 1997. He had to beguile his way into that. The tryout was only for players within a 30-mile radius of New Orleans; because Breaux Bridge was two hours away, Delhomme used the address of an aunt and uncle who lived in Metairie, a New Orleans suburb.

A month after the tryout, the Saints invited Delhomme to town for a weekend minicamp and signed him as a free agent. New Orleans waived him during the preseason, then signed him to its practice squad in November.

Delhomme played in NFL Europe in the springs of 1998 and '99, but in five seasons in New Orleans he appeared in just six games (two starts) and attempted only 86 passes. Not much of a resume but enough to pop up on some important radar screens.

Brooks remembers a game in December 2002 in New Orleans,

where the Saints were trying to preserve a late 3-point lead over the Bucs. When Aaron Brooks got hurt, Delhomme came off the bench cold and completed a 10-yard slant pass to Joe Horn on third-and-8. The Saints then ran out the clock.

"It was like wow—where did this guy come from?" says Derrick Brooks. "That's how much he has snakebit us through his whole career."

Soon after, Panthers officials started studying tape of Delhomme, who would become an unrestricted free agent after the '02 season. One by one, the team's scouts studied him. One stamp of approval begot another. It was like a snowball effect.

"I can remember sitting in a room—we have this little darkroom where we watch film—and it was me, (general manager) Marty Hurney and three pro scouts," says Mark Koncz, Carolina's director of pro scouting. "As you were watching Jake throw and things would be happening, we'd be like, 'No, no, no ... yeah! Great throw!' There was an excitement in the room, and we started rooting for the guy."

When the Panthers traveled to New Orleans for the final game of the '02 regular season, Koncz and two other scouts made the trip.

During timeouts, they focused their binoculars on Delhomme. When the Saints had the ball, they noticed Delhomme would stand close to the play-caller. When the offense came off the field, Brooks would go sit on the bench, but Delhomme would look at the still pictures with the offensive coordinator. Delhomme also would walk the sideline, interacting with teammates.

"At that point," Koncz says, "we were like, 'This guy is respected. He's got leadership qualities.'"

Delhomme already possessed some of those characteristics when he played for Teurlings Catholic High in Lafayette, La., where in one game

A strong leader with a stronger arm

Before Jake Delhomme became the third NFL quarterback to undergo Tommy John surgery—a procedure more commonly performed on baseball pitchers in which a ligament in the elbow is replaced by a tendon from another part of the body—he did not consult the other two, Craig Erickson and Rob Johnson.

Delhomme's injury, which had been bothering him since the 2005 season, was a little different. In addition to the torn ligament, he had a bone spur, a piece of bone floating in his elbow and an injured forearm muscle.

But he never doubted he would play football again. "There was never a thought of, 'Hey, this is it,'" he says. "That never crossed my mind. Because the minute it tore, I was pain-free. I knew something was bothering me, so we're going to get it fixed."

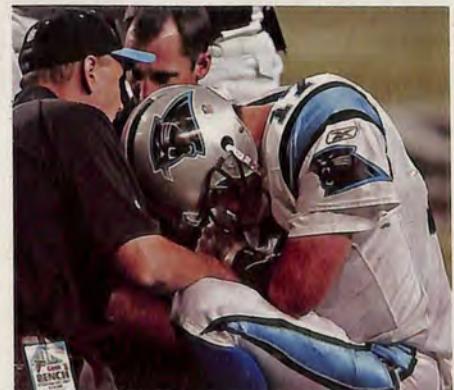
Dr. Pat Connor, one of the Panthers' team physicians, performed the 90-minute procedure October 17, 2007. Delhomme then rehabbed under the direction of Panthers head athletic trainer Ryan Vermillion, who assisted Erickson after his surgery in 1998.

Less than four months after the operation, Delhomme started throwing a Nerf ball: 20 throws per day from a 10-yard distance. He graduated to using a slightly heavier ball, then started throwing a

regulation football when the Panthers began their offseason program in late March.

Delhomme can't point to specific passes as examples, but he knows his arm is stronger now, at age 33, than it was the previous few years. "I wouldn't say (it's as strong) as when you're in your 20s, but my arm does feel very good," he says. "I can tell you there's a little more something behind it."

—Dennis Dillon



Delhomme's 2007 season ended during a Week 3 game against the Falcons.

After playing with multiple quarterbacks last season, Smith is happy to have Delhomme back under center.



Delhomme didn't get much attention at Louisiana-Lafayette.

he passed for more than 400 yards, intercepted two passes and then saved a victory by blocking a late field goal attempt. But he had to learn the finer points of being a leader.

"He was as hard on himself as on anybody," says Teurlings coach Sonny Charpentier, then the team's offensive coordinator. "But he sometimes was hard on everybody around him when things weren't going well. I remember having to sit him down one time and talk to him about how he can't treat them all the same. Some guys need a kick in the butt, some guys need a pat on the back. In his early career, his nature was more kicking everybody in the butt."

Delhomme, 33, describes himself as "anal and regimented" during the season. "When the (NFL) schedule comes out in April and you ask me what I'm going to be doing at 2:15 on October 23, a Thursday, I will tell you exactly where I'm going to be and what I'm going to be doing," he says. He might have inherited his disposition from Sanders Delhomme, his paternal grandfather. Even though Jake is the baby of 21 grandchildren on that side of the family and Sanders died when Jake was 9, some of Sanders might have rubbed off on him.

"He was a man who couldn't read or write," says Delhomme. "He worked in the oil fields, had some cattle and some land, raised horses. People revered him, people liked him. He was a man's man. He believed in doing something a certain way. And what he said went."

Get to know ... JAKE DELHOMME

- Must-watch TV: *American Idol* (in the offseason).
- What I drive: A Lexus in Charlotte, a GMC 4x4 truck in Louisiana.
- Favorite flicks: All of the *Rockys*, I-IV; *A Few Good Men*; *The Shawshank Redemption*; *Braveheart*.
- Superstition: If I do something one week and it works, I'm going to do it again the next week.
- Worst habit: Is hardheaded a habit?
- Talent I'd most like to have: I wish I could sing, just be able to carry a tune.
- Favorite sports team or athlete growing up: The Boston Celtics and Larry Bird.

"Maybe some of that trickled down to me. Maybe I do have some of my grandfather in me. But not in all areas. I'm low man on the totem poll at home. I've got a wife and two girls, so you can imagine where I rank."

A LEADER—ALWAYS

It's easy for a quarterback to be a leader when he directs the offense on a game-winning 2-minute drive or when he walks up and down the sideline exhorting his teammates during a close game or when his team is losing at halftime and needs a boot in the backside.

But the best quarterbacks also lead far from the screams of the maddening crowd. They lead when no one is looking. Delhomme leads even when he can't physically lead.

Last year, after his elbow injury knocked him out for the season, Delhomme wrote a letter to Smith, his primary receiver. Delhomme knew what it was like to be without his right hand man. In 2004, Smith broke his fibula and missed the final 15 games.

This time, Smith was without his quarterback and Delhomme could empathize.

"Steve is very emotional. I knew he would get frustrated at times," says Delhomme. "I knew it was going to be a difficult year for him. I know how hard it was for me not having him in the '04 season."

"It was more or less, 'This is going to be a different year for you, and you're going to have to take a deep breath at times,'" Delhomme says, providing the CliffsNotes version of his message.

Smith calls the letter, which he still keeps in his locker, "the most telltale sign" of he and Delhomme's relationship.

"It really meant a lot to me because I knew he was going through a hard time," Smith says. "For him to take time out of his situation with his elbow to write a letter, I thought that was pretty meaningful."

When you're Jake Delhomme, you don't lead only when the spotlight is on, your team is losing and you need to take it for an 80-yard scoring drive in less than 2 minutes. Sometimes, a phone call or a letter is just as effective. That's why he's the Panthers' alpha dog.

Larry Bird

- Three people I'd like to invite to dinner: Both my grandfathers. I don't know who the third would be.
- If I didn't play football... I was either going to be a physical therapist or probably a high school coach."
- Bucket list: Play football as long as I'm having fun. Win a Super Bowl. Build my horse farm the way I want it. Be a good dad and husband.

Passion plus confidence equals leadership



John Riggins

The fighting was frantic, and no one could gain the upper hand until Crazy Horse emerged on horseback riding through the fray of bullets and arrows on the battle line, crying, "Today is a good day to fight; today is a good day to die." In that moment, Crazy Horse's braves started a rout of Major Reno's troops across the river and into the hills that would become known as the massacre at Little Bighorn.

I never tire of playing this scene out in my mind. It's an example of the highest level of leadership, an example of how commitment fueled by confidence and bolstered with vision can change history or shape chaos. And, this is the essence of the NFL; it's one of the game's main attractions, the lessons learned we apply to our mundane lives.

Every week, we watch as NFL coaches and players, and even some owners, try to get the proletariat to follow. There is no protocol that guarantees success, but all levels of successful leadership have common traits.

The first part is passion and confidence: When we want it our way, we better have an unshakable belief it's the right way. Next is the two-way street of commitment: What the leader seeks, he too must possess. When confidence and passion command commitment, the only enemy is shallow vision. Even though there is a common denominator, leadership is demonstrated in myriad ways.

I never was in a huddle with Joe Montana but have met him, and he seems to be an unassuming guy. He's not a person one would think was class president, but my instincts tell me in the huddle with a Super Bowl on the line there existed in him a quiet and lethal passion—a passion so committed to prevailing and borne of self-confidence that it was impossible to stand in its way. That's pretty heady stuff, and it is highly contagious. Reminds me of Gary Cooper or Clint Eastwood.

When people ask what it was like to play for Joe Gibbs, I tell them he could have been the chairman of General Motors had that been his interest. (I'm sure many stockholders now wish it had been his interest.) He almost always had control of the situation, starting with his assistant coaches on down to the players. He was a problem solver, not an authoritarian; regardless of what was thrown at him, he maintained focus.

But what really set him apart was at halftime of a game. Joe would confer with his coaches and then address the team on how we would attack in the second half. Watching him coolly lay out the 30-minute offensive was amazing. He could have been teaching an algebra class because his vision for what would happen next came across as exacting as an equation. We left the locker room believing there could be no alternative to the second half outcome. When they do the Joe Gibbs story, they should see if Robert Duvall is available to play the lead.

The more members of a group, the more important leadership becomes. It's prevalent in the animal world, and so it is in the NFL. They're even important in the fantasy world of the movies; I mean, they are called leading men, right?

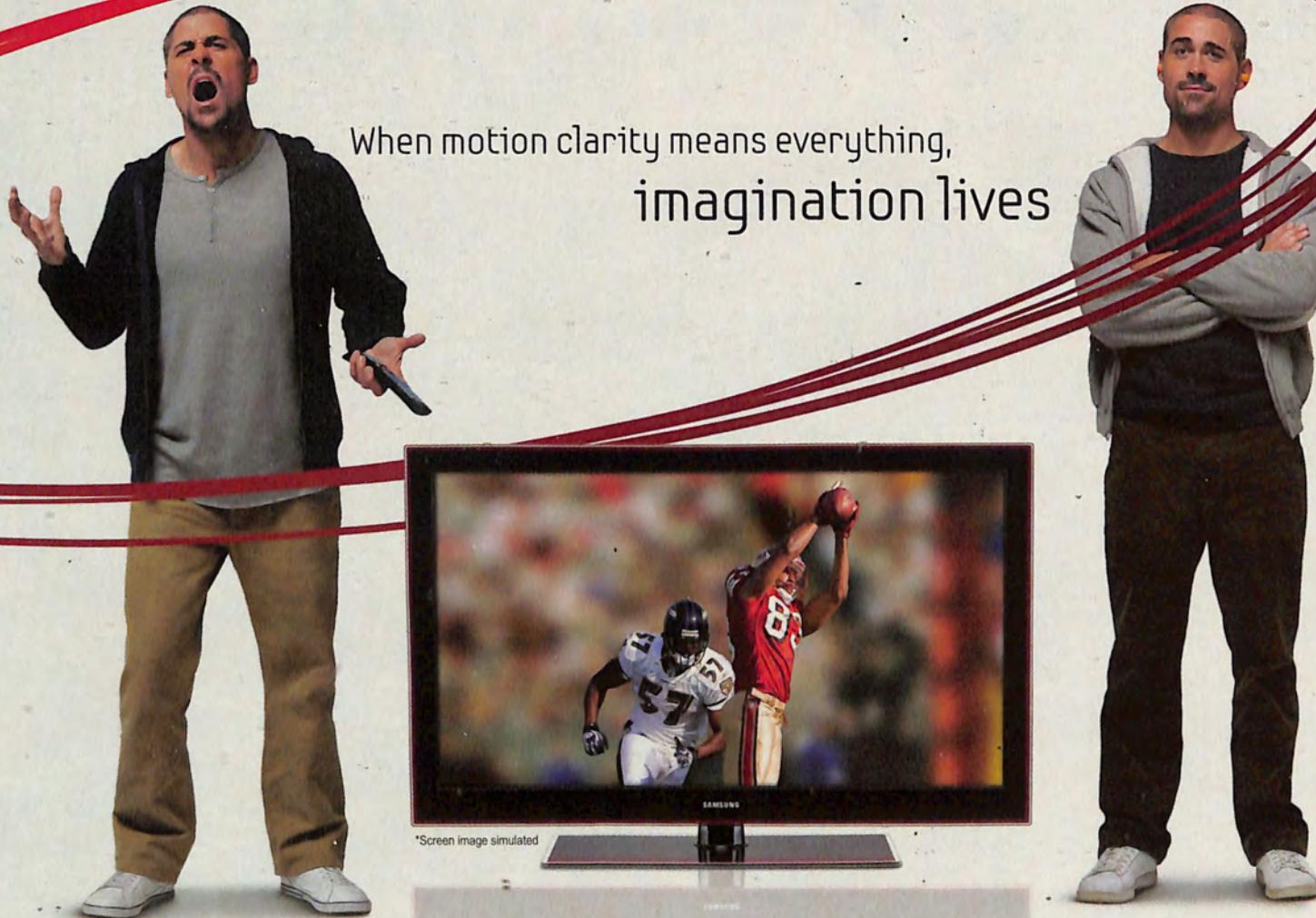
John Riggins, a Pro Football Hall of Fame running back, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.



NFL PLAYERS

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*Screen image simulated

Name: Dave "The Yeller" Pope and his twin brother, Chuck.

Home: Hoboken, New Jersey

Passion: Quiet Sundays in front of the TV.

Quote: "My television has a volume control. My brother Dave does not."

TV: **Auto Motion Plus™** The new 120 Hz Samsung Series 8.

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I'm a better coach now than I've ever been

Sporting News Conversation:

Mike Krzyzewski

He led the Olympic team back to the gold medal stand and has won three national titles at Duke. But after 33 years in coaching, he says he still has work to do.

Officially, Mike Krzyzewski did not win a gold medal in Beijing. Olympic rules stipulate only athletes are awarded medals at the Games. It's kind of funny when you think about it. If the United States had fallen to Spain in the gold medal game, there's no doubt who would have gotten the blame. But Krzyzewski and his staff of Mike D'Antoni, Jim Boeheim and Nate McMillan led the Americans back to a position of dominance in Olympic basketball.

Now Coach K is starting his 29th season at Duke, and he'll try to get his Blue Devils, who are in the top 10 in most preseason polls, back into national championship contention. Last season, Duke lost in the second round of the NCAA Tournament, and in 2007, it fell in the first round.

Krzyzewski, 61, sat down with *Sporting News*' Mike DeCourcy to talk about expectations, working in the NBA and why he doesn't have a lot of close friends who are coaches. During the 40-minute conversation, he flashed no new bling but wore the smile of a winner.



SN: You went to the national team with a mission, to make USA Basketball what it ought to be. Having won the gold medal, how much of that job do you feel has been accomplished?

KRZYZEWSKI: It's not just me personally. (Managing director) Jerry Colangelo has been the architect of it. I'm not sure we're completely positive about where we want it to be. It's a process. Whereas we were so damned sure of where it was. Like, we're the preeminent, it's only our game—all of this stuff. We were wrong about that. It's the world's game.

So now in this three-year period there's been a lot accomplished. One, the world respects us. We were humble ... we weren't off on our own. If you'd seen the people around after that gold medal game, everyone felt good. I thought it was a great celebration for basketball. We're in a really good spot, a spot we've probably never been in.

SN: Will you coach the national team again?

KRZYZEWSKI: I don't know. There's a lot of stuff ... I probably will not, but I'm not saying I wouldn't entertain it, and I'm not politicking for it.

To me, the key factor is Jerry's role—more than a coach, and, to be quite frank with you, more than any one player. He has two things going for him. One, he's traversed this course for three years. Four years, really. And second, he knows how to make money. None of this is funded by anybody. You have to figure out sponsorships, exhibitions, all these types of things.

This has been a great thing. There's no question about it. People actually cheered for our team. It was their team. It's crazy-good. Now, what do we do with it?

Mike Krzyzewski

SN: What did you miss by dedicating the last three years to coaching this team?

KRZYZEWSKI: Oh, I think it's what I would have missed. If I didn't do it, I would have missed so much learning. I'm a better coach now than I've ever been. It doesn't mean we're going to win three NCAA titles again. I don't know what it means. But I learned a lot. I'm energized.

You know what? I probably have missed some family time. My family has been great about allowing me to do this.

SN: What did you learn about coaching NBA players?

KRZYZEWSKI: One is that they're good guys. They're really smart. And they want to be a part of a team. They wanted to represent their country. They never were really a problem for one second. I love them.

SN: Did doing this stoke any fire at all ...

KRZYZEWSKI: No.

SN: ... to coach in the NBA?

KRZYZEWSKI: No. I loved it. It was fantastic, incredible. And I'm really happy here. We worked really hard since I've been back—actually, we worked really hard before we left—to get recruiting, to get our team, in place. Sometimes, when you condense things, you may even do a better job.

SN: Did you think there was a cost at all to Duke for those three years?

KRZYZEWSKI: You know, I never thought of it that way. It was such an amazing opportunity for everybody involved. My school felt that. I just felt, on this stage ... the school itself was going to benefit. Our Fuqua School (of Business) is opening up five global campuses. To have this kind of exposure is crazy, crazy-good.

SN: How hard were the last two years at Duke, not getting to the Sweet 16? How difficult was that for you?

KRZYZEWSKI: It's difficult for me because my players don't get in it. And then you have to try to figure out why that happens. Have we practiced too hard early? Did we use the right people? All those type of things. I think



Krzyzewski loved coaching NBA players such as Deron Williams (left) and Jason Kidd (right) for a summer, but he's more than happy with his job at Duke.

Henderson and the Blue Devils have exited early from the NCAAs the past two years, and their coach wants to advance more for them than he does for himself.

Greatness vs. goodness

Mike Krzyzewski says this season's Duke team has "double-figure players on our team that can play." He is excited about the experience and star potential. So maybe this team will bear a greater resemblance to the most recent Duke team to win an NCAA championship than to the most recent Duke team, which lost in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

2000-01	2007-08
35-4	28-6
No. 1	No. 7
No. 1	No. 9
8 players	10 players
2.5 years	2.1 years
Jay Williams, 21.6 ppg; Shane Battier 19.9 ppg	DeMarcus Nelson, 14.5 ppg; Kyle Singler 13.3 ppg
90.7	Scoring average
20.2	Average margin of victory
.481	Field goal percentage
.416	Field goal percentage defense
.19.1	Turnovers forced per game
5.0	Blocks per game

— Mike DeCourcy



Krzyzewski says his players have elite talent, but they must show it by producing elite results.

what media and everybody does, the fans. But they also have to feel it some from me. I have to at least eliminate that if I'm putting out those vibes. Because I don't want to put those out.

SN: When you do something as long as you have done this, people from the outside look at when you might think about not doing it anymore. But sitting here with you, seeing your energy, it's hard to ask that question.

KRZYZEWSKI: No, no. Don't even ask it. I mean, after these three years, doing what I've done, I'm really good about coaching. I mean, I love it. I'm not tired. I'm energized. And I love my team. This is as good a group of kids—they can match up with anybody's players. Now, some of them, a couple of them, two or three of them, have got to show that they're in an elite category.

There has to be a little bit of separation by one to three of our players. And those guys going in are G (Gerald Henderson), Jon (Scheyer) and Kyle (Singler). And they're capable of doing it. Now, how can I provide them whatever I need to provide them so they can get there?

SN: You've made your feelings known about the (NBA) age minimum, but have you resisted recruiting the one-and-dones? Has

your approach changed as you've seen it work or not work?

KRZYZEWSKI: Obviously, we need to look at them because we'll be competing against them. I wish they could go (to the NBA) out of high school, and if they came they stayed two years. I just think that keeps a balance between academics and athletics.

Also, by just having kids for one year, we're hurting the juniors and seniors. The promotion of our game has turned into being like the NBA: stars. Even (North Carolina's Tyler) Hansbrough, who was college player of the year, you didn't hear about him as much as O.J. Mayo and Kevin Love.

We will look at guys. The thing I would look at is one, do we need that specific type of player? Two, is that kid willing to go to school while he's here? In other words, you have to unpack your bags. And three, what are his surroundings? Is it somebody that you're dealing with directly? Are you dealing with a group of people?

SN: Do you think the NCAA Tournament will ever go beyond 65 teams?

KRZYZEWSKI: I think it will expand, maybe just a little bit. We have 65, and that's really a disservice to whoever is the No. 1 seed. You're not treating all four No. 1 seeds equally. That's wrong. One No. 1 seed is playing somebody who has already played, and it may

Five things you didn't know about Coach K

Sporting News contributor and acclaimed author John Feinstein knows a thing or two about Mike Krzyzewski, who wrote the foreword for his book *Last Dance: Behind the Scenes at the Final Four*.

1. He likes to relax by working in his garden. He doesn't play golf, and, since his hip surgery, he can't play much tennis or racquetball.

2. He's a dyed-in-the-wool Republican.

So much so that he undoubtedly voted for a Navy grad, John McCain, over a fellow Illinoisan, Barack Obama. He once said he would never skip voting because he had to be sure to cancel out Dean Smith's (Democratic) vote.

3. He was the leading scorer on the Weber High School basketball team in Chicago as a senior.

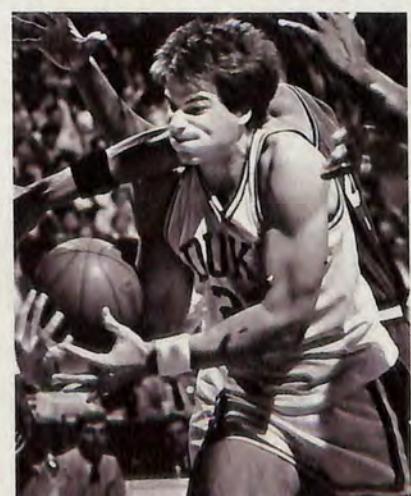
When asked why he only averaged eight points a game playing for Bob Knight at Army, he said, "SOB wouldn't let me shoot."

4. The best pregame pep talk he ever gave was—not surprisingly—before a Navy game.

Except it wasn't a basketball game—it was a football game. Fred Goldsmith asked him to speak to the team before Duke played Navy in 1994 and then was a little embarrassed because Krzyzewski got so wound up during his talk. Duke won, 47-14.

5. The first key recruit to commit to him was Jay Bilas in 1982.

Mike was flying to California to watch Bilas practice but wasn't allowed to speak to him per NCAA rules. On the phone before the visit, he asked Jay if his parents could recommend a restaurant to go to after practice. Bilas said he would have his coach hand Mike a note with the name and address of the restaurant. He did—as Mike was leaving the gym. When he opened the note it said, "Coach, my parents say the best restaurant to go to is ..." It then gave detailed directions. The last sentence of the note said: "I know this isn't nearly as important as the restaurant, but I've decided to go to Duke ... Jay"



Bilas informed Krzyzewski he would attend Duke in a note delivered by his coach.

Mike Krzyzewski

end up being harder. The people who do the tournament never play in those things. They just think a 1-16 will never happen.

If it does expand, it will go to 68. And I think it should go to 68. And then we've got to figure out if we can maintain the magic. Going to 68, you maintain the magic. You do anything more ... you better be really careful.

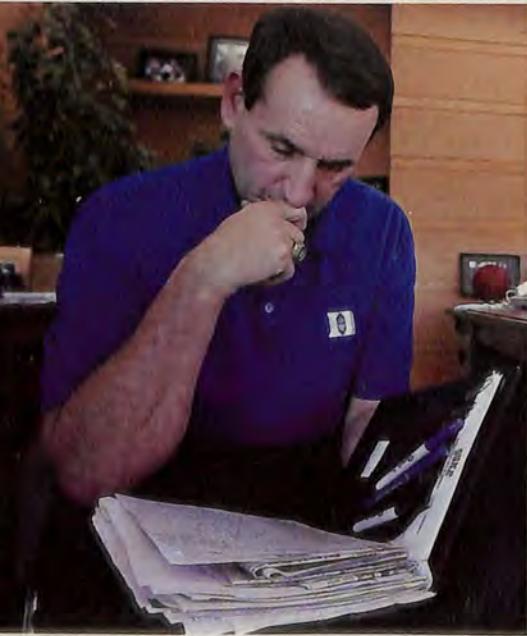
SN: Who would you say your closest friend in coaching is?

KRZYZEWSKI: Probably Jim Boeheim, P.J. (Carlesimo). The guys who've been on my staff, Mike (D'Antoni) and Nate (McMillan)—we were all like co-head coaches of that team. We shared a great experience. I think if you've won a lot, you never have that many close friends in coaching. I mean, close-close. But that's fine because I've gone outside of coaching to develop that.

SN: How has your relationship with Roy Williams been?

KRZYZEWSKI: Good. It started, we were both past presidents of the (National Association of Basketball Coaches). You're on the board for 10 years. And how many meetings does that mean you've been at together? Again, I don't socialize with him, but I think we're friends. I think I'm pretty good friends with Gary Williams. We're the same age. In the league, there's a lot of younger guys. Obviously, I thought I was pretty good friends with Skip (Prosser) before the tragic event. It's not like I'm out there looking to make a bunch of new buddies.

Even after 28 years at Duke, Krzyzewski is still always looking for ways to make his team better.



SN: You said you didn't miss much during the years you were committed to the national team. But now that you have more time, are there things you're doing to fill that?

KRZYZEWSKI: Well, we're writing a book. It's going to be a great book. My daughter and I have been working on that a lot. And just trying to get with my team.

SN: In your Olympic experience, what player surprised you?

KRZYZEWSKI: First of all, Dwyane Wade. Wade was spectacular. Not great. Spectacular. And I thought he would be good, but he had been injured. And he was spectacular. And his teammates loved it, which I think helped him, helped him a lot.

The other guy is Chris Bosh. I told him this as he started to emerge that sometimes, it's like an actor. You play all comedies, and you're good in them, and all of a sudden you're in a drama—and you're even better. When the whole thing was over, I said, "I hope you realize just how good of a player you are. That you're not just this four guy that's supposed to shoot a jump shot." I loved every guy on the team, but Dwyane and Chris—they went above.

SN: If you had a blank roster and could pick Tyler Hansbrough or Stephen Curry, which one would you choose?

KRZYZEWSKI: You always go with the bigger guy. And then we'll try to figure out a trade—10 draft picks—to get Stephen.

I think any team that you would have right now in college basketball, Hansbrough would be the No. 1 pick. He earned that last year. He's earned that because it's not just his ability, it's his spirit. He has a champion's spirit, a spirit that permeates through an entire team. I truly respect who that kid is. They'll be the prohibitive favorite. Especially if they win the whole thing, he'll go down as one of the all-time greats. To me, he's one of those guys already.

SN: How good will the Duke-Carolina games be this year?

KRZYZEWSKI: They've always been pretty good. They were good last year. We split, and we were leading them here with 5½ minutes to go. And then we didn't score. I know they had a lot to do with that. We kind of contributed to it. So they'll be terrific games. ... I think everybody will pick them No. 1. Wherever we're picked, we have a chance to be good. And those two games—or three—I know they'll make us better. There's no question that playing in those games makes you better.

Take it from the pros—Krzyzewski will stay right where he is ...

NCAA championship? Check. Olympic gold medal? Check. That just leaves an NBA title missing from Mike Krzyzewski's coaching resume.

So what kind of pro coach would Coach K make? We asked seven NBA stars who suited up for him in Beijing, including one, Carlos Boozer, who also starred for Krzyzewski with the Blue Devils.

► Carlos Boozer, Jazz

"He'll never leave ... Duke—he had a chance with the Lakers (in 2004). It would take an organization like that to get him to leave and a team that can win a championship, too. I think he proved this summer that he can coach professionals. That would never be a question. It would have to be the right scenario for him to leave, and I don't think he wants to leave because he's king of Durham."



► LeBron James, Cavaliers

"Coach K would be a great NBA coach because he relates with the players and is good at getting guys motivated to play every night. He also has a great knowledge of the game and would be successful if he ever decides to make the jump. But I don't think he should. He belongs where he is."

► Carmelo Anthony, Nuggets

"I doubt he'd ever come to the NBA. I'm sure he'd be good, though. His motivation, his intensity, his knowledge of the game and his experience are what make him a good coach. But he's not ever going to the NBA. He's the perfect college coach, and he'll just keep doing that."

► Dwyane Wade, Heat

"He's a great coach. Him coaching in the NBA would of course be beneficial for his resume, but I don't think he needs to. He's respected worldwide now, especially with the Olympic gold medal, plus what he did in college. I don't think he needs to bother with even thinking about coming to the NBA."

► Michael Redd, Bucks

"He would do a great job (in the NBA). He's a players coach. He understands the game, and I think he would do really well."

► Chris Paul, Hornets

"He would be a good coach at any level, whether it's college or the NBA. He knows how to motivate players and knows the game of basketball, and that translates on all levels."

► Deron Williams, Jazz

"I think he'd be a great NBA coach. Not too many college coaches that leave to go to the NBA have much success, but I believe he's one of them that could do it (because of) the passion he brings for the game, the energy and I think guys respect him. I think if you can get 11 to 12 of the best guys in the world to respect you, why can't you get an NBA team to? ... I don't see him leaving (Duke). I think he loves what he does. I think he's a great college coach, and he has a great legacy there."

— Jeff D'Alessio

...but could he hack it in the NBA?

So maybe Mike Krzyzewski won't ever bolt for the NBA, but that doesn't mean he isn't capable. Four former general managers weigh in.

Jerry Colangelo

Suns

"He has the innate qualities of leadership that would make him a big success in any field. Bottom line, Coach K is a winner with leadership qualities to be successful on any level. He has been around pros for a long time, way before '92, when he was an assistant with the Dream Team. He has respect from having so many players who have gone on to the pro level."

Billy King

76ers

"I don't think we'll see him coaching in the NBA. I think that chapter has come and gone. I asked him when Larry (Brown) left (Philadelphia), and considering the history we have, when he didn't, I felt he would not be going to coach (in the NBA)."

Jerry West

Lakers, Grizzlies

"Mike would have a chance for incredible success. He's a proven commodity, and it would be a coup for an NBA team to get him. One element that Mike has going for him that is so important is he believes in defense. That allows coaches some stability. You're not going to win with offense in this league

every night. Mike has worked with NBA coaches and NBA players. He sees the different skill level. He's seen the best of the best. He's a tremendous coach who seems to have a nice way with players and a balance of what's a good fit for a team offensively and defensively."

Harry Weltman

Cavaliers, Nets

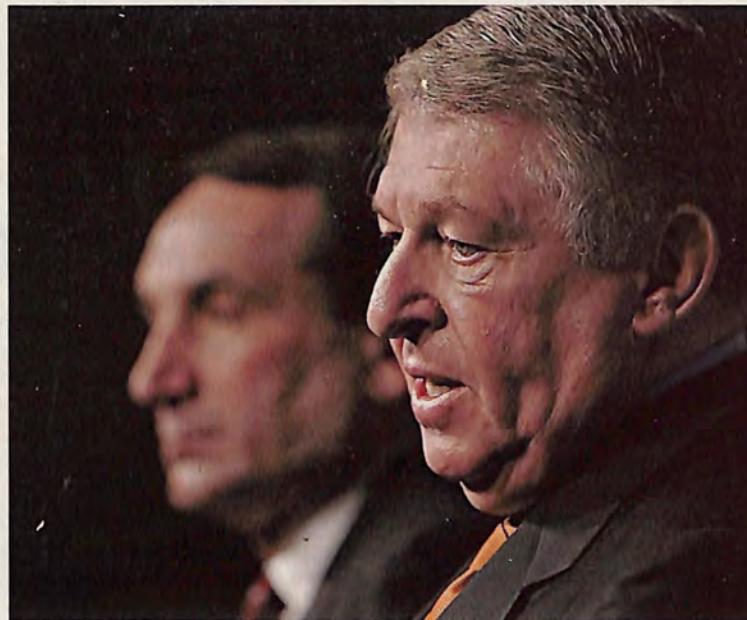
"A guy who can run one company doesn't mean he can transfer successfully to a completely different company. You have to wonder if he would be a little too rigid to deal with a lot of professional kids and some of the veterans. But I have a lot of respect for Mike. He's established himself as a terrific coach with pro and college players, and he has done a great job at Duke."

John Gabriel

Magic

"As challenging as the transition is, I refuse to believe the stereotype that a good college coach can't make the transition to the pro game. Each person has to be evaluated on his own. Two qualities that are important in the pro game are poise and durability."

— Stan McNeal



Colangelo says Krzyzewski would be a natural in the NBA, which is one reason Colangelo hired him to coach Team USA.

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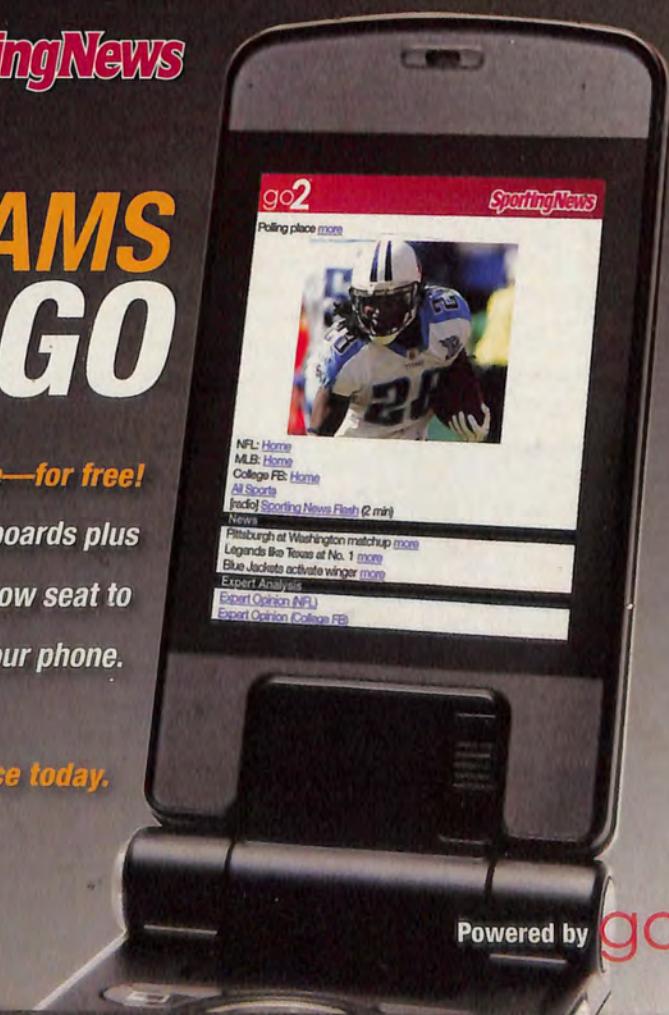
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Blessings borne in sorrow

With the memory of his grandfather and his college coach always with him, unassuming Hornets star Chris Paul doesn't project inner pain but rather the self-confidence he gained while learning from—and learning to live without—two dear friends

By Sean Devaney

Photos by Bob Leverone/SN

A day earlier, Chris Paul didn't think he'd be able to do this. Here he was, star point guard for the New Orleans Hornets, one of the best young players in the game, watched and admired by millions, but this was too much.

Still, he slid out from the pew, his shoes clip-clapping the brown hardwood floors of Holy Family Catholic Church in Clemmons, N.C., foggy in both brain and body. He tromped up the stairs and made it to the lectern, the light of the stained-glass windows behind him. To one side was the casket holding the body of Skip Prosser, Paul's former coach and one of his best friends and mentors. Paul breathed deep. It was, maybe, the loudest noise in the church, silent despite the 650 or so mourners. Paul began to speak.

When he was asked to give a eulogy for Prosser—who died of a heart attack at age 56 in July 2007—Paul was reluctant. The notion of sharing his pain with a large crowd wasn't appealing. "He was hurting," says Dino Gaudio, who had been an assistant to Prosser at Wake Forest before succeeding him. "He had a special bond with Skip, and he wanted to keep it private. But when I saw Chris the day of the funeral, he said he had changed his mind about the eulogy. I asked him why. He said, 'Because Coach would have done it for me.'"

Paul wasn't merely speculating. Prosser had helped him through some tough times. Five years before his death, Prosser signed Paul to play for the Deacons on a mid-November afternoon at West Forsyth High, just a few miles from Wake Forest University. Paul was a recruiting gem for Prosser, a hometown kid and the best point guard in that year's class. As Paul was signing his letter of intent, his grandfather, Nathaniel Jones, watched. Jones, so close with Paul and his older brother, C.J., that he is still described by Paul as "my best friend," was wearing a Wake Forest hat. His face beamed.

Paul has lost plenty, but that hasn't kept him from giving, as he did to 90-year-old Winston-Salem resident Gracie Wardlaw.







Along with Olympic teammates Jason Kidd (left) and LeBron James (center), Paul brought home a gold medal, but he won't call it the most important thing he did all year.

After the signing, Jones took Paul outside. "Christopher Emmanuel Paul," Jones told his grandson (whom he almost always addressed with his full name), "I will remember this day for the rest of my life." Jones cried. The family celebrated that night.

The next night, Jones was robbed in his driveway. He was beaten by a group of teenagers and died.

Paul gained national attention when, the day after burying his grandfather, he scored 61 points in West Forsyth's win over Parkland. Paul was so distraught that he not only considered skipping the game but quitting basketball altogether. Quietly, though, he approached coach Dave Laton and asked to stay on the floor the entire game. Laton—somewhat baffled—agreed. Paul, never a pure scorer, had put up 59 points in the game when he drove to the hoop, made a layup and drew a foul. Standing at the free throw line, with 61 in the box score, he intentionally airballed the free throw. Sixty-one was the number of years Nathaniel Jones had lived. This was Paul's tribute to him. Paul walked off the floor, buried his head on the shoulder of his father and cried. "That," Laton says, "was one of the most unforgettable performances I've seen."

The Paul brothers had always had a tight relationship with their parents, Robin and Charles, who, C.J. says, were very loving "but not afraid to give out a whupping when they needed to." It was their feisty and independent grandfather—owner of a popular Chevron service station, the first African American-owned station in North Carolina—who spoiled Chris and C.J. He didn't spoil them with candy and Cokes

but with responsibility and lessons in self-confidence. He'd give them real jobs around the station, trust them unsupervised, show them how to rotate tires or change air filters.

In a way, Prosser filled that void after Jones' death, helping Paul past the pain while providing the same level of trust and responsibility that Nathaniel Jones had shown in him. Prosser liked to say that he coached Paul by giving him the ball around 7 p.m. and asking that he give it back in good shape two hours later. "They were both mentors to me in the same sort of way," Paul says. "It wasn't a relationship where they'd tell me what to do. They'd teach me by letting me go and do it myself. Coach did it with basketball. My grandfather just did it with life in general."

A few months after Jones' murder, when Paul was a freshman at Wake Forest, he wrote an essay that was read during the sentencing for two of the youths convicted of Jones' killing. In the essay, Paul recalled the signing of his letter of intent, writing, "This event put a smile on my best friend's face that will be cemented in my mind FOREVER."

Paul was 17 when his grandfather died. He was 22 when Prosser died. In a five-year span, Paul had to give testimony in the trial of those who murdered his best friend and mentor, then give a eulogy for another best friend and mentor. "We have a strong family, and we always support each other," C.J. Paul says. "But I wouldn't want anybody to go through what Chris has gone through. Especially not twice."

Despite his personal losses, Paul carries himself without a hint of victimhood or even inner pain. If you didn't know Paul's back story, you'd find him to be impossibly perfect—world-class professional athlete, consensus first-team All-American, dean's list, high school class president, member of the Spanish club and, of course, a guy, who doesn't smoke, drink, swear or ever forget to call his mama. Sheesh. Ask about his grandfather or Prosser and Paul speaks with the same ever-present eye contact and steady, soft voice he'd use to answer you about his last game or about his mom's tuna-and-hot dog casserole. "I still carry them both around with me, and I don't mind talking about them," Paul says. "It's a way for me to keep the memory of them alive. God makes things happen for a reason. Something might hurt now, but in the long run, it happens for a reason."

For Paul, that's not just a platitude. He was taught early in the everything-for-a-reason orthodoxy and found help in God. As a high school freshman, Paul was barely 5 feet. He was 5-2 as a sophomore, which kept him from playing for West Forsyth's varsity team. He knew he didn't have much of a chance at basketball success unless the Big

A model performer

You'd have a hard time finding folks who have negative things to say about Chris Paul. Even Julius Hodge, the former N.C. State guard who was famously—it was replayed ad nauseam on highlight shows—punched in the groin by Paul during a Wake Forest road game, said he's long since forgotten the incident. But you'll have no trouble coming up with those who sing Paul's praises.



Kevin Durant, Thunder guard.

"I've known him since I was in high school. He was in the area when I was playing, and, out of the blue, he came to one of my games. You know he loves basketball, an NBA player coming to watch a high school game. But we just talked from there. When I was a senior in high school, he would try to come by and see me, and once I got to the NBA, he really helped me out with advice and adjustments. He is a great guy to know. He is someone I look up to, someone I want to model myself after."



Jarrett Jack, Pacers point guard.

"I actually first met Chris when I was 12; he was 11. We played against each other in a tournament. Then, I am at Georgia Tech and he is at Wake Forest, and the first time we played against each other, he said, 'I remember you, we played against each other.' He remembered it, I still can't believe that. I was like, 'Wow, nothing gets past this guy!' That's how Chris is with people."



Ludacris, actor/singer.

"Chris and I both started our charitable foundations about the same time, and it's worked out so well because we have always supported each other. Anytime Chris needs me, when my schedule permits, I am there. You know, 'With great power comes great responsibility.' Chris embodies that."

— Sean Devaney

Man Upstairs granted him some extra inches. So, throughout high school, Paul prayed for height. He got just enough—Paul is 6 feet, tall enough to have NBA success but short enough to keep him sensitive about it. Still, if Paul were to harp on the negative of being on the short side, there's a chance he'd miss the blessing of being tall enough.

His blessings, Paul acknowledges, are many. After leading Prosser's Wake Forest team to a school-record 27 wins in 2004-05, Paul became the No. 4 pick in the NBA draft. His off-court transition into the NBA was made difficult by the Hornets' evacuation of New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina, but he was an immediate star on the court, winning a near-unanimous rookie of the year selection in 2005-06. Now in his fourth season, he has piled up breakout year on top of breakout year, smiling all along.

Smiling, at least, until game time. "He's a great competitor," Olympic teammate Kobe Bryant says. "No matter what you're like off the court, most great competitors are the same on the court. Intense, focused. That is how he is."

He's the same way, no matter the foe—switching from the good-guy vibe to Paul the Pitiless in minutes. "You can be good friends with Chris," says Pacers point guard Jarrett Jack, who has been playing against Paul for more than a decade. "You can see him before the game and you're joking around. When the game starts, it's like he doesn't know you. He doesn't want to know you. He just wants to beat you. Then, the final buzzer sounds and he will say, 'Say hi to your family for me.'"

That duality seemed to come together in the whirlwind of the past year, when Paul not only averaged 21.1 points and 11.6 assists and led the Hornets to a surprising 56 wins but he won an NBA Community Assist award for his philanthropic efforts. His play earned him a spot on the All-NBA first team, confirming his ascension into the league's elite. He was the runner-up to Kobe Bryant in MVP voting and, in early July, converted that success into a four-year contract extension with the Hornets that will pay him \$68 million. After signing

the deal, Paul was off to Las Vegas to train with Team USA, then headed to Beijing to help the Redeem Team win gold.

But there is the concern that Paul is spreading himself too thin, especially at a time when the Hornets—loaded with young talent around him—are trying to break into the NBA's top echelon. "What he has done in the past year, most people could not handle in an entire career," says Paul's coach, Byron Scott. "I really wanted him to get a rest because one thing I know about Chris Paul, he is going to push himself. In the first few weeks of training camp, I forced him to skip some of the workouts. I almost had to physically hold him out, he wanted to be on the floor so bad. He was mad at me. But I told him, I am sorry, this was just too busy of a summer."

Crammed between the Olympic adventure and the start of Hornets camp was what Paul calls "the most important thing I do all year." For the third straight September, he hosted a "Winston-Salem Weekend," a four-day event planned largely by Paul and his family to give back to the community where he grew up. It is insanely ambitious. In four days in his hometown, he sponsored a concert by Ludacris (he ensured that tickets were just \$10), dedicated a computer learning center, read to kids, played a game with special-needs kids, helped distribute boxes of food to 400 struggling families, hosted a formal dinner and silent auction, ran a youth basketball camp and created a pro-am tournament featuring NBA players (including Dwyane Wade, LeBron James, Kevin Durant and Rudy Gay) and professional bowlers. And on Sunday, he invited everyone to church with him.

Paul did one other thing over the weekend—he personally delivered a Meals On Wheels lunch to the home of 90-year-old Gracie Wardlaw. When he stepped onto Wardlaw's porch, she quickly sized him up. "I thought you'd be taller," she said, obviously unaware she was touching a nerve.

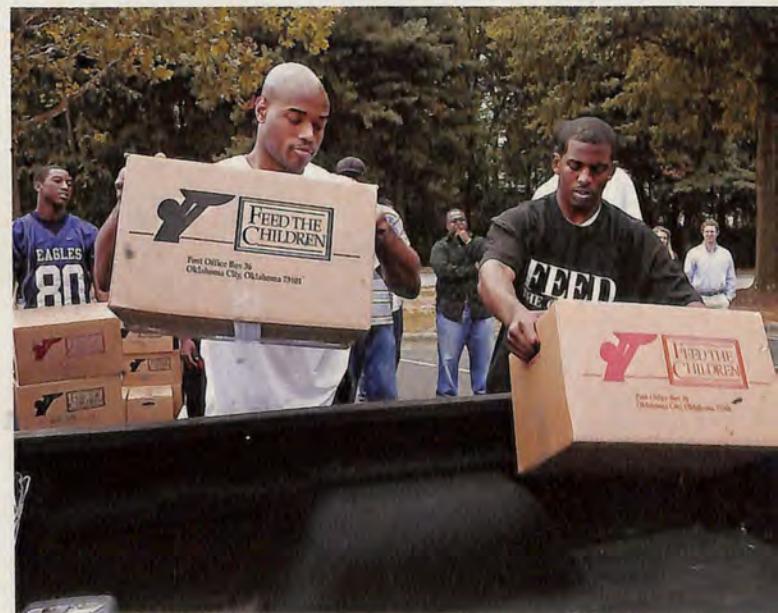
But Paul just smiled. "You know," he said, "I thought I would be taller, too."

Paul stood and chatted on Wardlaw's porch for about a half-hour. They talked about the neighborhood, how it had changed, how it had gotten tougher, a little less nice. But Wardlaw kept repeating that Paul was different, a nice person. When Wardlaw told him how proud he made the whole community, she began to cry, and Paul was obviously left short on words. He hugged Wardlaw, whispering, "Stop crying. Stop crying."

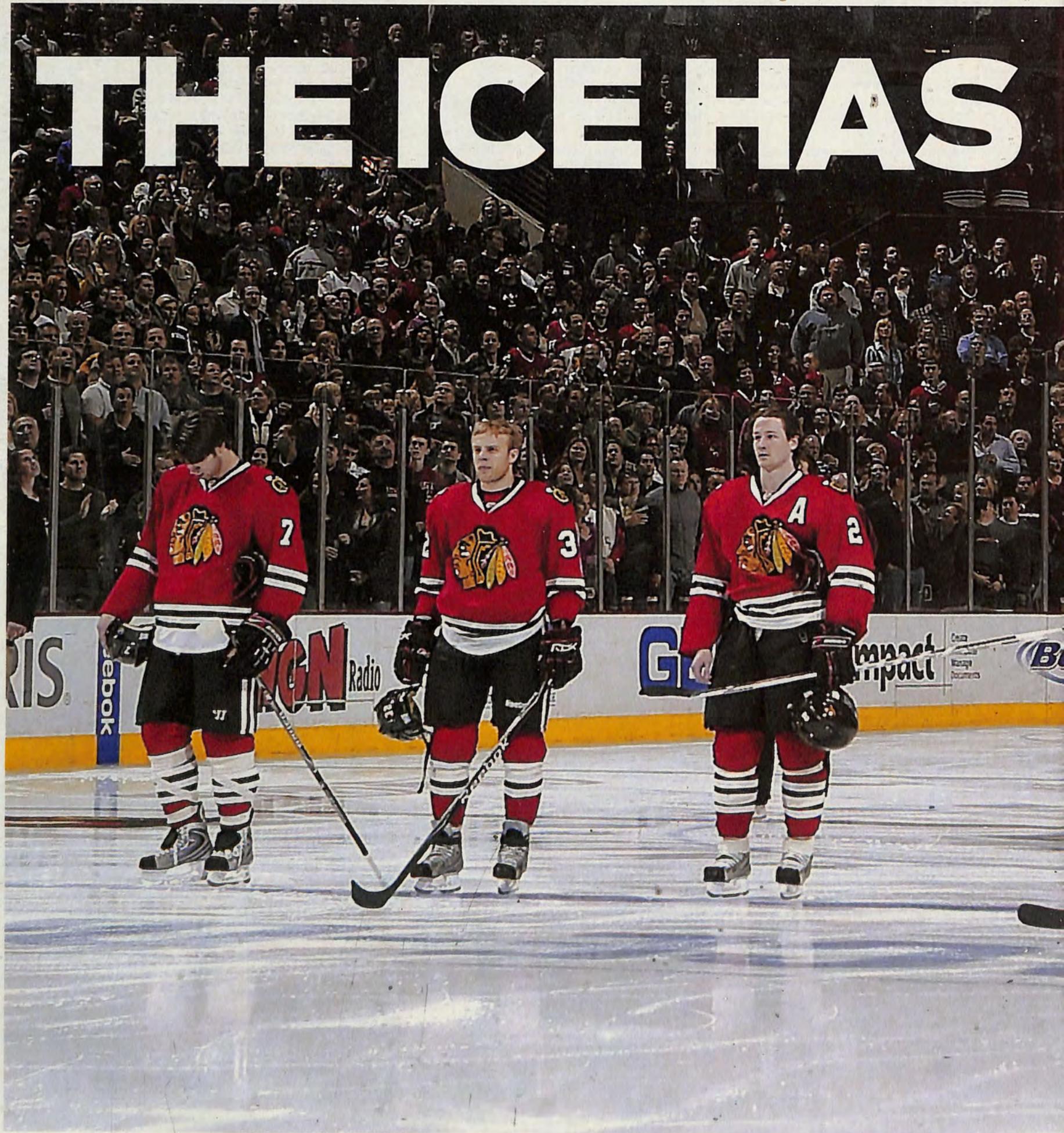
As he left the porch, one of Wardlaw's neighbors, Carla Tomlin, told Paul she remembered him from his days helping out at Nathaniel Jones' service station. She said she had pumped many gallons at that station and that, if she was short on money, Jones would fill up the tank for her anyway. The station is deserted now. "But I still pass by there, and I always think of your grandfather," Tomlin said.

As she said it, Paul kept his chin high, maintained eye contact and nodded his head. "Yeah," he said in a voice without a sign of a tremble, "so do I."

Into four days, Paul crammed (clockwise from bottom left) reading to kids at a Boys & Girls Club, organizing a pro-am bowling tournament (which included Hornets coach Byron Scott), playing basketball with special needs kids and giving food (with Pacers guard Jarrett Jack) to needy families.



THE ICE HAS



THAWED

For decades, the Blackhawks have kept fans, legendary former players—even success—at arm's length.

New owner Rocky Wirtz, the son of the man who maintained the status quo, has changed everything.



By Craig Custance

Rocky Wirtz wanted a bottled water. It didn't seem like an outrageous request from the new owner of the Chicago Blackhawks. But in the final years under his father's control, the organization was so cheap that even bottled water was a luxury.

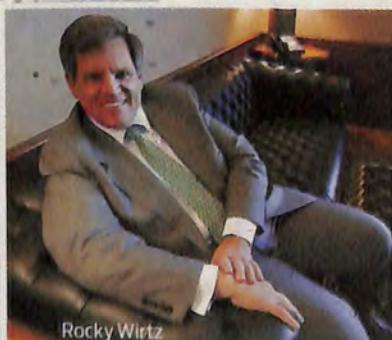
If it's water you want, Wirtz was told, the best option is that five-gallon jug with a little paper cup.

Wirtz had seen not only the empty seats at the United Center but empty sections. He had witnessed the Blackhawks' disappearance from the mainstream sports coverage in Chicago, to the point where he had a hard time getting a hockey score on the radio. He knew the fan base had deteriorated from angry to disappointed to apathetic. It just didn't care anymore.

But something about his inability to get bottled water in the team offices last year stuck with him. If this one easily fixed detail was being overlooked, what else is seriously wrong with this franchise?

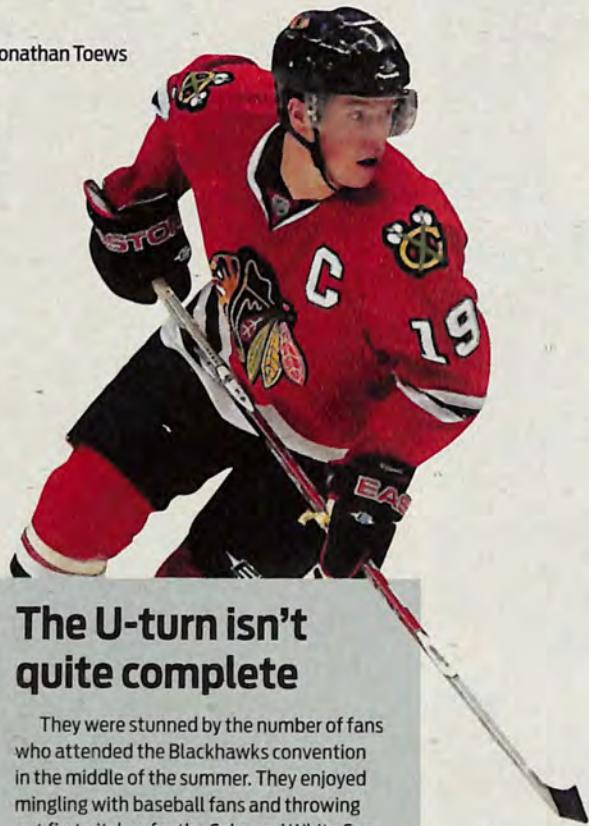
He set out to fix it, to fix it all. Even if it meant going against everything his father had believed. He had

learned so much from his dad, Bill Wirtz, but to revitalize the Blackhawks, he needed to reverse major decisions his father had made. Immediately.



Rocky Wirtz

Jonathan Toews



The U-turn isn't quite complete

They were stunned by the number of fans who attended the Blackhawks convention in the middle of the summer. They enjoyed mingling with baseball fans and throwing out first pitches for the Cubs and White Sox during the offseason. They even tolerated a red carpet public relations event before the home opener.

But the Blackhawks players would prefer if everyone would go easy on talk about the resurrection of hockey in Chicago. In their minds, the job won't be complete until the team starts winning consistently.

"We know we haven't accomplished a whole heck of a lot yet," says captain Jonathan Toews. "It's fun to have this buzz and the hockey back in Chicago, but we still feel that, not that we don't deserve the attention, but we have a long way to go before it sinks in and we feel we do deserve it."

The Blackhawks haven't made the playoffs since 2002, when they lost in the first round. They have played in the postseason only once in the past 10 seasons.

This season started slowly, which cost coach and fan favorite Denis Savard his job after four games. But under new coach Joel Quenneville, the team has rebounded to 7-3-5 and is showing signs of ending the playoff drought.

"It's been fun. Coming in last year, we were getting 2,000, maybe 3,000 people at a preseason game. Now the games are sold out," says forward Patrick Kane. "We saw the beginning. You see the middle. Hopefully the final will be the Stanley Cup."

— Craig Custance



The wonder years

Pierre Pilote is one of the best defensemen ever to play the game. Reliving the history of the Blackhawks through the eyes of a 76-year-old Hall of Famer helps explain why the erosion of an Original Six franchise in Chicago was so heartbreaking.

Playing hockey in Chicago Stadium in the 1960s was an experience unmatched in professional sports. The impact is so firmly etched in Pilote's memory that he can recall exactly how many steps it took to go from the ice to the dressing room: 17.

He'd skate onto the ice, along the boards and see the same fans every game. But in the '60s, these weren't just fans—they were friends. Circling the rink, he'd give a wave to a few familiar faces and more than likely see them at dinner that night.

The stadium was ear-splitting loud, with the upper balconies that hung over the lower seats making it even louder.

"It was built like a fortress," says former goalie Tony Esposito, one of the best ever to stand between the pipes. "You had a feeling like you were from the gladiator days."

Then came the announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, please stand..." The national anthem in Chicago Stadium, the booming organ leading the way, was an event unto itself. It became legendary, with the cheering gradually growing louder and louder until thunderous applause drowned out the final notes.

It got so loud and the vibrations so strong that former Chicago defenseman Doug Wilson used to look up and make sure he wasn't underneath the clock that hung from the ceiling.

"If you didn't get goose bumps running up and down your neck, you were a tougher man than I was," says former Blackhawks goalie Glenn Hall.

During the game, Pilote could close his eyes and, based on the sounds coming from the fans, know exactly who was shooting the puck.

If there was a chorus of "Mooooooose" raining down from the balconies, he knew big defenseman Elmer Vasko was letting a shot rip. The cheers for Bobby Hull had a different sound. The best player to ever wear the red sweater generated equal parts anticipation and exhilaration. The exhilaration came after the goal.

When Hull wound up, all the fans jumped to their feet. It was going to be a big shot, a big goal. Everybody in the building knew it.

It was a love affair between a city and its hockey team.

"But nothing lasts forever," Hall says.

In 1961, the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup. They haven't won it since.

The fans stopped caring

If you're looking for a starting point for the demise of the Blackhawks, Hull is a good place to begin.

Following the 1971-72 season, one in which he scored 50 goals in 78 games, Hull's contract was up. There were signs that things were icy between players and management.

During good times, the players' children often got the best seats in the house—right between the benches. Now Hull was being told kids weren't even allowed in the dressing room after games.

There were promises of new contracts that never happened.

"They didn't show much interest in signing me, and meanwhile (the Wirtzes) were floating around the Caribbean in their 110-foot ship," Hull says. "They left some lawyer here in Chicago to try and sign me and never really did offer me a contract until the (World Hockey Association) agreed to have me come to Winnipeg. It seemed to me they didn't show enough interest in me after giving my blood, sweat and tears for 15 years."

The best player in team history took his huge slap shot to a rival league in a city about 720 miles from Chicago, starting a cold war of estrangement between Hull and the Blackhawks that lasted 35 years.

His departure sent a message. If Hull was expendable, who wasn't? Soon, others followed. There would be more good teams in Chicago, especially the Blackhawks of the 1980s, but they weren't consistent, and couldn't be. That would cost too much. By the late 1990s, the last good Blackhawks team had been disassembled.

Ed Belfour. Jeremy Roenick. Chris Chelios. Gone.

John McDonough caught a glimpse of the franchise's deterioration one afternoon and was stunned. In 2002, McDonough was the president of the Chicago Cubs, an all-

Chicago's new leadership has put fans back in the seats, and guys like Kane have given them something to cheer about.

consuming job. A graduate of Notre Dame High School in Niles, Ill., the Chicago area native hadn't paid close attention to the demise of the city's hockey team.

But one Sunday that year, he took his two sons to the United Center for a game against Ottawa. The place was empty, so McDonough walked over to a vendor setting up and asked what time the game started.

McDonough was convinced he'd shown up several hours early. He was right on time.

He explained to his sons that it wasn't always this way. Looking at the empty seats, that was hard to believe.

"This is Chicago, Illinois, one of the largest markets in the country. How could this happen?" McDonough says. "There was profound sadness."

Owner Bill Wirtz clung to antiquated theories about running a sports franchise. Fans took it personally, but then, even worse, they stopped caring.

The NHL's lockout in 2004-05 wiped out the few diehards who remained. The year after the lockout, the Blackhawks finished 29th out of 30 NHL teams in attendance, edging only the New York Islanders.

Roenick found it hard to visit the United Center. Having played for four other franchises since the Blackhawks traded him after the 1995-96 season, he says his biggest regret is that he didn't play his entire career with the Blackhawks.

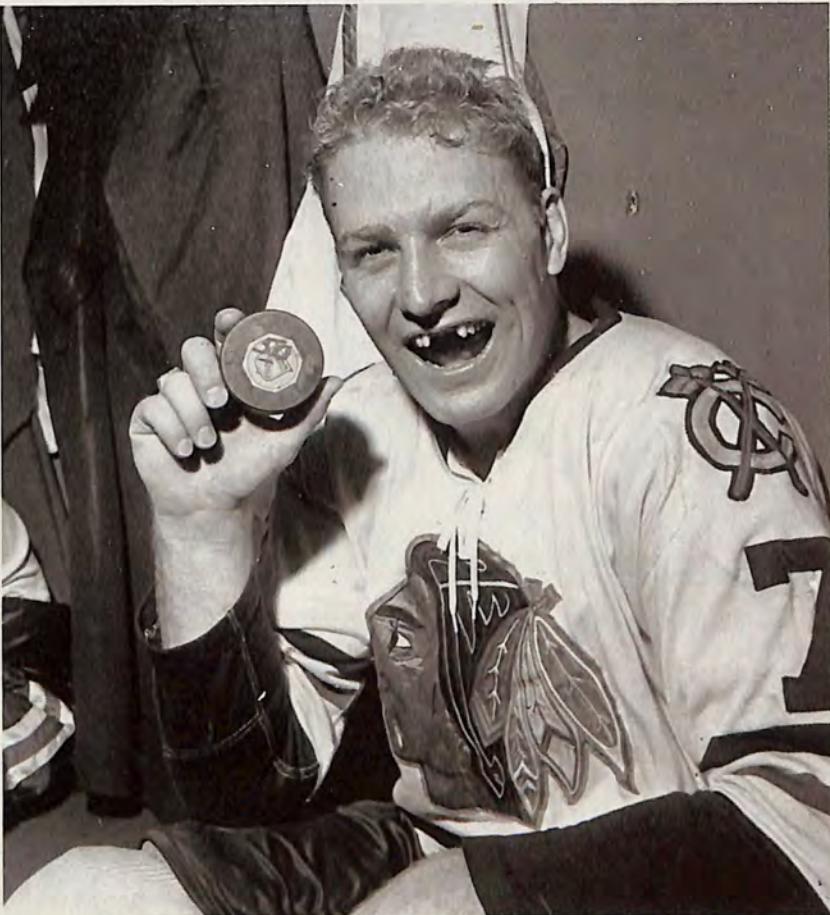
"What was even more heartbreaking was to hear yourself breathe during the national anthem. That's how quiet it had gotten," he says. "That was such an overpowering feeling, sitting there listening to the anthem. To not hear that anymore in Chicago ..."

That's what Rocky Wirtz inherited.

A changing of the guard

On September 26, 2007, Bill Wirtz died at Evanston Hospital after a battle with cancer. Part of the old guard in hockey, Wirtz was the chairman of the NHL's Board of Governors for 18 years and spent 41 years as president of the Blackhawks.

Hull spent a lot of years as the face of the Blackhawks, and, after a 35-year estrangement, he's finally back with the organization.



HULL/AP

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He also was the man Chicago fans blamed for the demise of their team. He was notoriously tightfisted, not to mention stubborn.

During a moment of silence at the arena following his death, fans actually booed.

But privately, people close to the team say Wirtz wasn't the only one to blame. Bob Pulford, who had been Wirtz's right hand man and the team's senior vice president since 1990, was someone to whom Wirtz was fiercely loyal. Fifteen days after his father died, Rocky Wirtz reassigned Pulford, giving him a job outside the organization with Wirtz Corp.

The regime change was on, and the resumes piled in. But Rocky didn't take any calls, didn't review any applicants or contact a headhunting agency for his new team president.

He wanted McDonaugh, the Cubs team president. The Blackhawks couldn't get anybody in the building, yet there was McDonaugh packing Wrigley Field every night despite the Cubs' reputation as one of the sports world's notorious losers.

Yeah, McDonaugh would be a good place to start.

He's up at 4:30 a.m. and reads four newspapers before getting in a morning workout.

And then? "I give 'em hell the rest of the day," McDonaugh says.

He's aggressive, energetic and driven, but most of all, he gets results.

McDonaugh doesn't just accept losing, doesn't mind high expectations, doesn't want to hear excuses and knows what kind of culture it takes to run a successful business. If you don't fit that mold, you're out. He never dreamed of leaving the Cubs, a team he'd been with for 24 years.

Rocky Wirtz and McDonaugh met informally, and their discussion lasted nearly five hours.

"He asked me a lot of questions, and I had a lot of 'I don't know's,' Wirtz says. "I

McDonaugh has only been with the Blackhawks a year, but he's already making his mark on the organization.

said, 'This is pretty bare bones, but if you have fire in your belly, which you obviously do, it's a great opportunity.'

The chance to turn around a team he grew up rooting for was more than McDonaugh could pass up, and he was hired by the Blackhawks on November 20, 2007. On the day he resigned from the Cubs, McDonaugh said goodbye to 100 or so people at Wrigley Field and was driven to the offices at the United Center.

"There was a serenity," he says of the feeling he had during the drive. "I just felt this was the right thing to do."

And then he started firing people.

All right, maybe that's not fair. But when he met with Blackhawks' employees, he didn't see the ambitious, driven people he needed to expedite the turnaround. He estimates that he made nearly 30 changes in staff, not counting coach Denis Savard, who was fired four games into this season and replaced by Joel Quenneville.

While he got his staff in place, he set out to fix old wrongs. He called Bobby Hull in Florida during his second day on the job, and Hull agreed to come to Chicago and meet with McDonaugh, who wanted to offer him a position with the team.

They sat in his office, and McDonaugh asked Hull to tell his side of the story. Why he'd been gone for 35 years. It went on for nearly two hours.

"It was painful, profane, toxic, humbling, but necessary. Really necessary," McDonaugh says.

Eight days later, Hull accepted the job.

"I almost got emotional," McDonaugh says. "I knew right then the cold war was over."

Finally, a revival

Each accomplishment under McDonough and Rocky Wirtz topped the last. Hull, Esposito, longtime center Stan Mikita and even Savard, still a fan favorite despite losing his job as coach, were hired as ambassadors. Once-fired announcer Pat Foley was rehired. All 82 games will be televised this season for the first time in team history. The Blackhawks signed two of the most sought-after free agents of the summer in goalie Cristobal Huet and defenseman Brian Campbell. Legendary coach and executive Scotty Bowman was hired as a senior advisor. The Blackhawks were awarded the outdoor Winter Classic, to be played against rival Detroit on New Year's Day at Wrigley Field.

And the fans returned. Boy, did they return. Season-ticket sales are up 300 percent after the team just missed last season's playoffs, and the Blackhawks got off to a 7-3-5 start behind young stars Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews. The team led the NHL in attendance for the month of October.

For years, Len Marchok and his son Tony had gone to a handful of Blackhawks games. They bought season tickets for the first time this year, simply because they worried that they wouldn't be able to get tickets otherwise. That's how much demand to see the Blackhawks has increased.

"You always had people who cared about this team, about 3,000 fans who would show up. But people felt like (Bill Wirtz) didn't care about them," says Marchok. "Rocky knew exactly what he was going to do, and he hit the ground running. It was a rebirth of hockey in this town."

Rocky's moves were a direct departure from his father's. For years, former players like Hull and Mikita wanted to be part of the organization. When attendance started to drop dramatically, Hull remembers, he approached Bill and his son Peter with ideas to help put people back in the stands. They weren't interested.

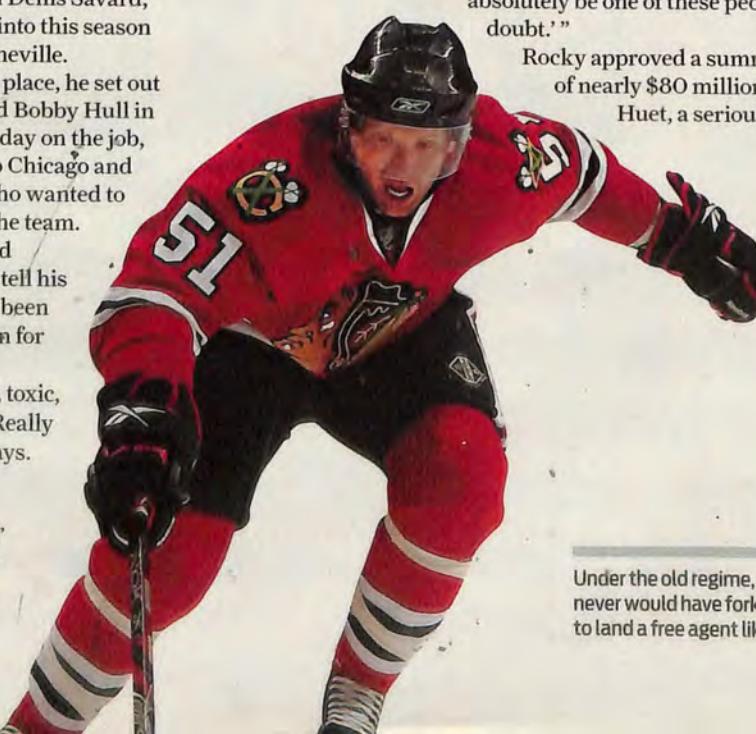
"They didn't care what kind of ideas I had, it wasn't going to be part of their thinking," Hull says. "They never did put people in the building."

Says Hall: "They didn't want anybody from within the organization, and that always bothered me, wondering why they would not want you when (you) played there."

Rocky Wirtz and McDonough have done the opposite—celebrating and hiring former players. Roenick was in town when the team honored Hull and Mikita during a game last season and was touched by the change. He made a point of approaching Rocky to congratulate him.

"I said, 'This is awesome what you guys are doing here. I hope I'm a part of it in the future,'" Roenick says. "They said, 'You will absolutely be one of these people, without a doubt.'"

Rocky approved a summer free-agent tab of nearly \$80 million for Campbell and Huet, a serious departure from the



Under the old regime, the Blackhawks never would have forked out the cash to land a free agent like Campbell.

penny-pinching under his dad, who became known throughout Chicago as *Dollar Bill*.

And there is no underestimating what it meant to the fans when Rocky put the home games on television.

Rocky laughs when he says how surprised he is now when fans wait in line to get his autograph. During a recent home game, one observer shook his head, saying, "I never thought I'd see the day when a Wirtz would get that kind of ovation in this building."

By reversing all the decisions that made his father wildly unpopular, Rocky has become a cult hero in Chicago.

But you can't help but wonder one thing.

Would dad approve?

"When it came time to do things differently, it didn't mean he was wrong and I was right. It just was different," Rocky says. "My goal is to have the balance sheet and company run better than it's ever done before, for the next generation."

"I think dad ..." Rocky starts, before pausing and correcting himself. "I know that's what dad would want."

With Bettman; it never hurts to ask



When Blackhawks president John McDonough was aggressively chasing a spot in the Winter Classic, he wondered if his dogged pursuit annoyed the commissioner.

Not at all, Gary Bettman says. In fact, the commissioner is thrilled to have such a passionate executive leading one of hockey's storied franchises.

"He was not annoying in the slightest," Bettman says. "He's a well-respected sports executive who knows not only what he's doing, he knows Chicago. He has been, and is, absolutely passionate about the turnaround the Blackhawks are seeing. Hiring him and the support Rocky (Wirtz) is giving him is nothing short of a stroke of genius."

McDonough has a framed menu autographed by Bettman from 21 Club—the famed New York restaurant—hanging over his office desk. It's from a lunch date during which McDonough planted the seed about hosting the Winter Classic at Chicago's Wrigley Field. Bettman remembers it well.

The new guy in Chicago has spent a lot of time in Bettman's ear, and the commissioner doesn't mind a bit.

"He had the hamburger," he jokes. Bettman understands why playing the Winter Classic in Chicago on New Year's Day is so important for McDonough. He also thinks the event will help the city in its bid for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

And McDonough isn't finished bending Bettman's ear. During a recent visit to Chicago, Bettman says McDonough lobbied to host the NHL draft.

"Again it was done in a cordial and businesslike way," Bettman says. "He's committed to doing everything he can to continue the resurgence of the Blackhawks. ... If they want the draft, they can have one."

When?

"In the not too distant future," Bettman says. "The next few years."

—Craig Custance

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BASEBALL

The annotated Kim Ng resume

The Dodgers' assistant general manager has been on "up-and-comer" lists for years. Find out who she is and where she has been and you'll know where she's headed—soon.

■ Hired by the White Sox as an intern in 1991, Ng quickly showed an aptitude for analyzing stats, moving to the forefront in baseball's use of computers in player development, procurement and analysis. "Gamers, baseball players vs. numbers," says former White Sox pitcher Jack McDowell, who, in part because of Ng in 1994, became the first reigning Cy Young award winner to lose in arbitration, "that will be Kim's biggest challenge ... knowing the players behind the numbers."

■ She interviewed for the Dodgers' G.M. job in 2005, after Paul DePodesta was fired.

■ While learning the game's administrative rules, Ng also broadened her contacts—including frequent caller Brian Cashman, who hired her when he was promoted to Yankees G.M. in 1998. Says Dodgers manager Joe Torre, who also worked with her in New York: "I don't know how people will take this, but she's one of the guys. She has that *baseball feel*."



■ Lasorda speaks as only a longtime manager—H.R. manager, that is—could: "Kim is very knowledgeable about the game of baseball, knowledgeable about the rules of the game, and conducts herself in a positive and professional manner at all times."

■ Having worked with her twice, Torre, if he has his way—and don't take this the wrong way—won't work with her much longer: "As far as I'm concerned, Kim Ng is ready. You know baseball: Sometimes it needs a nudge."

—Bob Hille

KIM NG

Dodger Stadium 1000 Elysian Park Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90012-1199 (323) 224-1500

OBJECTIVE
To build a championship team as a major league general manager.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Strong organizational and analytical skills.
- Keen ability to negotiate, as well as make difficult decisions.
- Willing to work long hours and patient enough to develop talent.
- Experienced at working for and with demanding owners, respected front office personnel, successful managers and dynamic players.

EMPLOYMENT

Vice President and Assistant General Manager, Los Angeles Dodgers 2001-Present
Assist G.M. Ned Colletti in player acquisitions and contract negotiations; oversee arbitration efforts, player development and scouting, and manage day-to-day operations, including medical, clubhouse and team travel divisions.

Assistant General Manager, New York Yankees 1998-2001
At 29 when hired, was the youngest assistant G.M. in majors. While in New York, team advanced to World Series four times, winning three.

Director of Waivers and Records, American League 1995-1997
Approved all player transactions and contracts; helped G.M.s and assistant G.M.s interpret and apply the Major League Rules and Basic Agreement.

Assistant Director of Baseball Operations, Chicago White Sox 1991-1994
Expanded duties to include representing team in arbitration cases.

Special projects analyst, Chicago White Sox
Assisted in analyzing player tendencies, signing free agents, tracking player movement, arbitration, negotiating contracts and budgeting.

EDUCATION
Bachelor's degree in Public Policy, 1990, University of Chicago

REFERENCES

- Ned Colletti, General Manager, Los Angeles Dodgers
- Tommy Lasorda, Special Advisor to the Chairman, Los Angeles Dodgers
- Brian Cashman, General Manager, New York Yankees
- Joe Torre, Manager, Los Angeles Dodgers

■ She has interviewed twice for general manager jobs, most recently with the Mariners, who hired Jack Zduriencik for the position. "It's only a matter of time," Ng's boss, Dodgers G.M. Ned Colletti, says, "before the opportunity finds her."



■ Though Ng calls the process "awful," arbitration is a strong suit. "Imagine," she says, "two or three people in your workplace you don't know all that well saying, 'Well, he's not that good.' It's tough. And then you have to shake hands and act like it never happened." She potentially faces a couple of tough cases this spring: outfielder Andre Ethier and catcher Russell Martin.

■ Ng works 90 hours a week during the season and cuts back to only 70 hours a week in the offseason.

■ The youngest person (26) to argue an arbitration case, she won the White Sox's case in 1996 against pitcher Alex Fernandez, represented by Scott Boras.

■ Ng was an infielder on the Maroons softball team, the team MVP her senior year (1990) after hitting .388 the year before—for a 1-24 team.

Kim Ng



3 QUESTIONS WITH ... NEW BREWERS MANAGER KEN MACHA

Despite going 368-280 in four seasons as the A's manager, Ken Macha was fired after winning his second A.L. West title in 2006. Now he's back on the bench in Milwaukee, and he spoke with *Sporting News*' Matt Crossman about his new challenge.

Q: What are the Brewers' strengths and weaknesses?

A: The four guys in the middle of the lineup—J.J. Hardy, Ryan Braun, Corey Hart and Prince Fielder—these are young guys who have had a tremendous amount of success early in their careers. (With CC Sabathia and Ben Sheets entering free agency), it looks like we're going to be a little thin in the pitching area. The bullpen at times last year was not as solid probably as they wanted it.

Q: What did you learn in Oakland that you can apply in Milwaukee?

A: Anybody who has a job anywhere learns something new every day. I remember getting the (A's) job and talking to (former manager) Whitey Herzog. He said, "You've got to act like there's a firecracker under your seat at all times because anything can happen at any time."

Q: What approach can fans expect from you?

A: I mentioned those four guys in the middle of the lineup. They all have tremendous power. I won't be having them bunt when they have a chance to change a game with one swing.

MACHA: DARREN HANCK / AP; WOOD: JOHN BAZEMORE / AP; ATKINS: LENNY IGNELZI / AP



Atkins was valuable in the Rockies' lineup, but he could do a lot for them on the trading block, too.

Few teams can afford a big-money gaffe



Todd Jones

Mistakes will be made with free agents this offseason, as is always the case.

But making an error on a big-ticket free agent hurts some teams more than others. The Yankees, Red Sox and Dodgers have enough money to cover up their mistakes by signing another player. However, a small-market team such as the Royals might have only one bullet. They used it on righthander Gil Meche (five years,

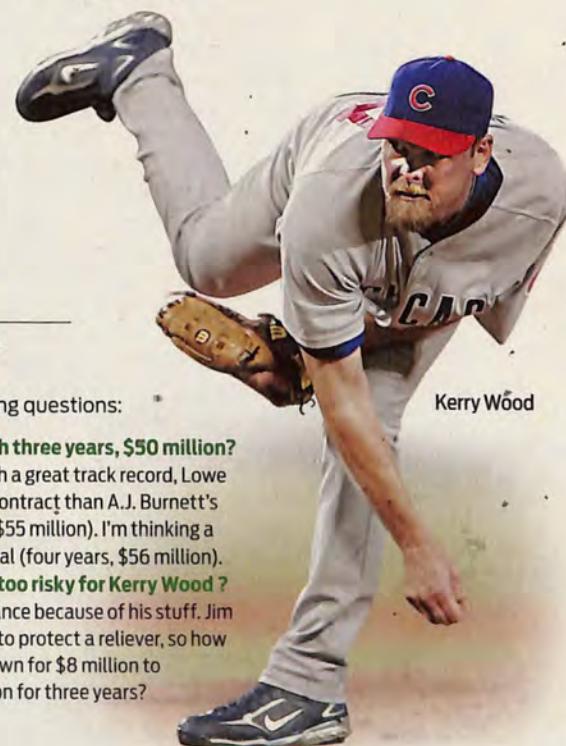
\$55 million) after the 2006 season, and Meche gave the club momentum and credibility to move forward. But if the Royals had missed, they wouldn't have been able to afford much of a backup plan.

When a mid-market team signs a player to a multiyear, multimillion-dollar deal, you know there will be cutbacks elsewhere. The signing could affect the quality of the bench players the team pursues or it could affect the scouting and development areas.

If you truly believe lefthander CC Sabathia is the guy to take you over the top, you pursue him. But when you're more than one starting pitcher away from championship contention, an attraction to the high-priced payroll monsters will wreck your financial planning.

Because of today's economy, spending wisely is even more imperative. If a team pays \$20 million a year for a starting pitcher, he needs to win the Cy Young award and/or at least 20 games to justify the investment. When a club assumes too much risk, things won't be good in any market. Unless you're the player getting the \$20 million.

Todd Jones, a former major league closer, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.



Kerry Wood

If I were a G.M. ...

The Closer has the answers to five of the toughest free-agent pitching questions:

Will CC Sabathia get a bigger contract than the Mets gave Johan Santana (six years, \$137.5 million)?

Santana's deal should be the ceiling for a starting pitcher. But you never know.

Will Francisco Rodriguez get more money than Mariano Rivera did last offseason (three years, \$45 million)?

Mo is the best. Unless some team panics, K-Rod won't get more.

Is Derek Lowe worth three years, \$50 million?

An innings-eater with a great track record, Lowe should get a better contract than A.J. Burnett's last one (five years, \$55 million). I'm thinking a Mark Buehrle-like deal (four years, \$56 million).

Is a multiyear deal too risky for Kerry Wood?

A club will take a chance because of his stuff. Jim Leyland knows how to protect a reliever, so how about Wood in Motown for \$8 million to \$10 million per season for three years?

Taking stock of the trading block

The Hot Stove League kicked into high gear when the Rockies traded outfielder Matt Holliday to the A's (the Padres weren't expected to be far behind with ace Jake Peavy), but the dealing is far from done. Other big names—literally, in Jarrod Saltalamacchia's case—who could be on the move:

▶ Rockies 3B Garrett Atkins

Contract: Arbitration-eligible; \$4,387,500 in 2008

Why trade him? With Holliday gone, the Rockies are in rebuilding mode. Atkins is an excellent hitter who will fetch quality in return.

Potential suitors: The Twins have a hole at third base, and the Angels have shown interest.

▶ Rangers C Jarrod Saltalamacchia

Contract: Not arbitration-eligible; \$396,710 in 2008

Why trade him? Texas has a surplus of excellent young catchers—Saltalamacchia, Taylor Teagarden, Max Ramirez, Gerald Laird—and, as always, needs pitching help.

Potential suitors: The Red Sox will have a void to fill if Jason Varitek doesn't re-sign, and the Marlins are in the market for a young (and affordable) catcher.

▶ Cardinals OF Ryan Ludwick

Contract: Arbitration-eligible; \$411,000 in 2008

Why trade him? His value never will be higher (37 homers, 113 RBIs), and St. Louis has a surplus of outfield talent.

Potential suitors: He was mentioned in a possible Holliday swap, but Atlanta could offer St. Louis the middle infielder it needs.

—Ryan Fagan

NASCAR

The end of one era, the beginning of another



Tony Stewart

What seemed like something so far off is finally here. I have driven my last race for Joe Gibbs Racing. My last race in the No. 20 car. My last race with crew chief Greg Zipadelli.

The NASCAR Sprint Cup Series season finale signified the end to a lot of things. It was the end of the 2008 season, obviously, but for me, it was the end of a long road I first stepped foot on back in July and at the same time, the continuation of a racing career that began when I first wheeled a go-kart at a Westport, Ind., racetrack back in 1978.

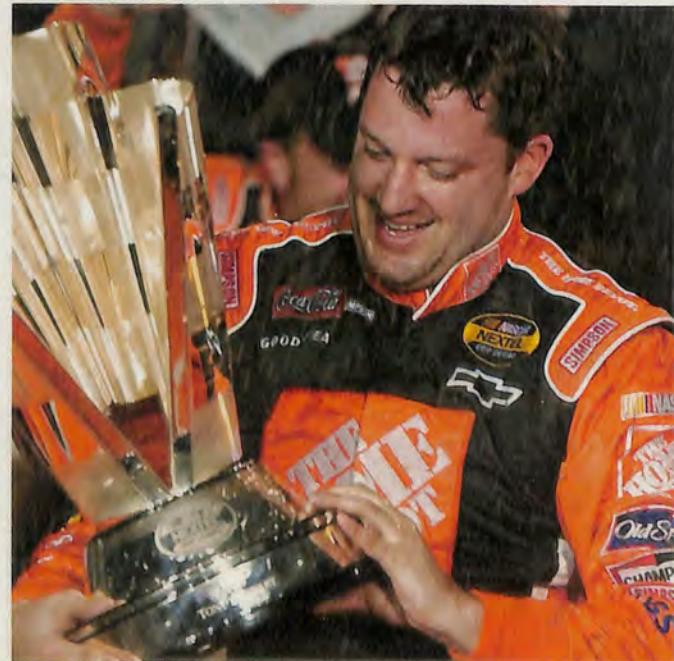
On July 9 the formal announcement was made that I would be leaving Joe Gibbs Racing at season's end. The other shoe dropped the next day, when we made the announcement at Chicagoland Speedway that I'd be adding to my list of job responsibilities considerably by becoming a driver-owner in the Sprint Cup Series with my own team—Stewart-Haas Racing.

Thanks to a lot of very good, very smart people at Joe Gibbs Racing, I won the rookie of the year in 1999, championships in 2002 and 2005, 10 poles and 33 races. And when you do all of that at the Cup level, the hardest question to answer is, "What's next?"

Initially, I thought it would be to keep winning more races and compete for more championships. And it still is that, but I'm a racer and I want more.

I wanted it when I was racing go-karts and had to have a trophy bigger than all

Stewart hopes he can duplicate the success he has had as a driver on the ownership side.



the other kids'. I wanted it when I made the move from go-karts to open-wheel Sprint Cars and Midgets. I wanted it when I went to Indy cars. And I wanted it when I went to stock cars. I've achieved so much, but along the way, I went back to my roots and started a World of Outlaws Sprint Car Series team. Then I added two USAC teams. Then I added another World of Outlaws team.

Today, I've earned nine championships as a car owner—two in the World of Outlaws and seven in USAC. And it has given me the urge to bite off the biggest ownership stake yet—a NASCAR Sprint Cup Series team.

I can't say that it has all been calculated steps along the way, but everything has happened at a period where I felt like we could handle the challenge. It has all come at stages in my life where I felt like I was at the right place to make a change or add something to my plate.

It still goes back to what I learned from Joe Gibbs, and that's surrounding yourself with good people and giving them the authority to do the jobs you hired them to do.

Obviously, there are a lot more people involved and a lot more variables that you have to worry about at the Cup level vs. the USAC or World of Outlaws level, but it's still about people and putting them in the right places within the organization. I can buy them the best racecars and the best equipment, but I still have to have the right people to build the cars, set up the cars and then drive the cars. It has definitely helped me get ready for what I'm undertaking as a NASCAR owner.

I'm ready for what the future holds because of the people Joe Gibbs surrounded me with. Zipadelli, my crew chief for the past 10 years, is probably the most notable person in my career and my life. Our relationship has lasted longer than any girl I've dated, and it sure as heck has been way more successful.

I'll take my time at Joe Gibbs Racing and hold on to it tight because I've learned a ton since that first Cup race at Daytona in February of 1999, and it's that knowledge that I'll use to make sure my next 10 years as an owner are as successful as my past 10 years were as a driver.

Tony Stewart, a two-time season champion in NASCAR's Cup Series, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

There were a lot of good times, but nothing lasts forever

With Tony Stewart set to drive for his own team, Stewart-Haas Racing, and new crew chief Darian Grubb in 2009, Greg Zipadelli will remain at Joe Gibbs Racing to nurture the talents of 18-year-old rookie Joey Logano. Zipadelli, who guided Stewart through a turbulent 2002 season to his first Cup championship, recalls some of the highlights of their time together.



"*Greg Zipadelli, my crew chief for the past 10 years, is probably the most notable person in my career and my life. Our relationship has lasted longer than any girl I've dated, and it sure as heck has been way more successful.*"

— Tony Stewart

I can remember our first win at Richmond (in 1999) and how many we thought we could have, should have won before that and how cool it really was to go win at a short track for our first win.

As far as wins go, I don't know of anything that's any bigger than our first Brickyard win (2005). That was an unbelievable relief for me and this team to finally be able to accomplish that there. It was getting to the point like the Daytona 500 is to us right now. We just tried to go and relax and not make it anything more than just another race, and it seemed like it kind of worked that way.

I remember being at Homestead (winning the 2002 championship), and I remember an unbelievable amount of relief, more of a relief that we accomplished what we thought—and the media and everybody thought—we should have. With the year that we had, and everything that had been going on at that time in our career, it was way more of a relief than maybe satisfaction or a sense of accomplishment. The second one (2005) was completely different. It was much more fun.

Back in the earlier days, we used to do a lot more together. We both had more time and less commitments, and things were a little bit more relaxed. It's been so long since we've done anything together outside of work and testing the last few years. ... I wish there was a way to keep this together and keep going, but you can't live in the past.

— As told to Reid Spencer



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Q&A with Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Last offseason, in a much-publicized move from his family's Dale Earnhardt Inc., Dale Earnhardt Jr. joined the powerhouse Hendrick Motorsports organization. In his first season with his new team, he did win one points race—at Michigan in June—and make the Chase, but he fell from the front of the pack in the points standings and wound up 12th. *Sporting News'* Reid Spencer talked to Earnhardt about his father, his fans and improving next season.

SN: You're a team owner as well as a driver. What can NASCAR do to help you?

EARNHARDT: They can do a lot of different things to help cut costs. They could do a lot of mandating of equipment parts to restrict spending and restrict development and research on it. They could offer different things such as spec motors. But it's tough because when you start taking the creativity out of the racecar, then you're taking away jobs for certain guys with those types of skills. The Car of Tomorrow changed a lot about how we look at the fabrication department and how many guys we truly need with the skills to lay a body on a car. Under the current circumstances, with the economy the way it is, it would be very exciting if NASCAR was very proactive to try to cut costs however they could.

SN: You and your father had different personalities and different driving styles, but one thing you had in common is the ability to evoke passion from your fans in a way no other drivers have. How do you account for that?

EARNHARDT: My daddy made a name for our family, and he created a mentality. He created a perception that we were very strong and very tough and dedicated people. The large majority of the American public is blue-collar and really relates to that type of mentality. He harnessed that, really, and made people excited to pull for him because he represented that type of person. I got very lucky to get a bunch of his fans, and a bunch of his fans want to see me keep the name out there and keep winning races and keep doing well.



SN: DEI has been in the news a lot lately. Are you still emotionally attached to what's going on there?

EARNHARDT: I'm not emotionally attached to it. I'm far removed from it emotionally. I stand on the sidelines with you and everybody else. I'm watching intently and I'm interested in seeing how it's going to work out, just like everyone else is, but it doesn't cross my mind daily.

SN: Now that you've had a full season with Hendrick Motorsports, what are your expectations for 2009?

EARNHARDT: You say you want to get better, but you can't put your finger on any specific thing that you need to do better, or really how you can make that better. Preparation's everything—showing up ready, showing up with everything dialed in, showing up and being fast right off the trailer. Those things are really important. Those things really make your confidence shoot up through the roof in the first couple hours of practice, and it really resonates through the rest of the weekend.

Earnhardt may not have achieved all his goals in racing, but he's happy with his life just the way it is.

SN: Does it ever get difficult just being Dale Earnhardt Jr.? Do you ever feel you'd like to go out in public and have nobody recognize you?

EARNHARDT: No, not really. I like it. I like the way my life is.

SN: Carl Edwards and Jamie McMurray recently announced engagements. Do you ever think about getting married, settling down, having a family—or are you content with the bachelor life?

EARNHARDT: I like everything in my life how it is. I'm happy for them guys. I don't know Carl's fiancee, but I think Jamie is pretty lucky. (Christy Furtell) is a good girl, and he made a great decision—I knew he would. But I just feel like it'll happen when it happens, man. I like driving racecars, and the rest of that stuff is going to have to fall in line whenever it comes along.



If HMS and Johnson (48) remain out front next season, it won't be because of testing.

NASCAR's response to the worsening economy is a drastic change

Just days after Dale Earnhardt Jr. talked to *Sporting News* about cutting costs in NASCAR, he got his wish: NASCAR eliminated testing in 2009 on racetracks that host events in its top three touring series and Camping World East and West Regional Series. Only Goodyear tire tests will be scheduled next season.

It's a dramatic move. Just five months ago, NASCAR floated the idea of unlimited testing. NASCAR weighed less restrictive

options, but the worsening economy moved it to impose the ban.

"I'm happy about that," Earnhardt says. "I think it is a great choice. It is going to save each individual team, like the No. 5 car, the No. 24 car, about a million and half dollars a year, so it's a great move."

Though the changes will save Hendrick Motorsports' Sprint Cup fleet—the Nos. 5 (Mark Martin in 2009) and 24 (Jeff Gordon) along with the 48 (Jimmie Johnson) and

Earnhardt's 88—some cash, owner Rick Hendrick would have preferred a less draconian decision. "I wanted to continue testing," Hendrick says. "But I'm going to do what NASCAR tells us to do. I think we'll have to see how it goes for a year.... It could be a substantial savings with motors, tires and people traveling around."

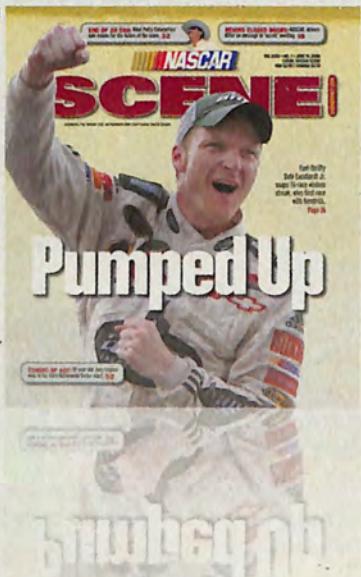
And with the state of the economy, that was the bottom line.

—Reid Spencer

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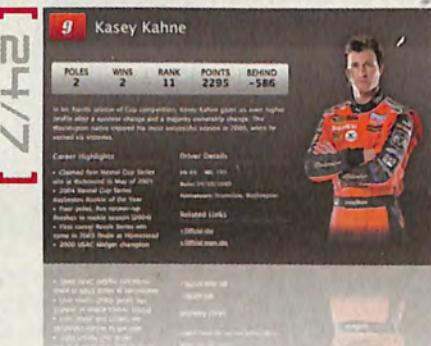


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How the Chase was won

Jimmie Johnson had his third straight championship all but locked up by the time they started the ignitions at Homestead, but that doesn't mean there wasn't a little excitement along the way



ESPN analyst Rusty Wallace, who won the Cup title in 1989, gives his take on the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup:

RACE 1

New Hampshire Motor Speedway.

Greg Biffle wins his first race of the season, but runner-up Jimmie Johnson leads the most laps (96) and is only a half-second behind at the finish. Carl Edwards affirms he will be a player in the Chase with a third-place finish. Johnson and Edwards leave Loudon tied in the points standings, with Biffle 30 points back, after the Chase's top seed, Kyle Busch, finishes 34th because of a broken sway bar.

► **Rusty's take:** I think Greg Biffle was a pleasant surprise to everybody. Biffle was kind of down on his luck and couldn't get the mojo going with that team, and all of sudden, it seemed like when they got the new crew chief, Greg Erwin (in 2007), everything turned around. I think all the media and all his peers took notice that Biffle was back.

RACE 2

Dover International Speedway. In the most rousing race of the Chase, Roush Fenway Racing teammates Biffle, Matt Kenseth and Edwards put on a thrilling show, finishing in that order. Johnson keeps pace with a fifth-place finish, but Busch falls out with engine problems and runs 43rd, effectively ending his

championship hopes. Edwards opens a 10-point lead over Johnson and Biffle.

► **Rusty's take:** I'll never forget that race. They were battling back and forth and racing each other hard. Once Biffle won at Loudon and served notice that he was back, then when he comes back and wins again, it was like his stamp that, "Hey, I'm in this thing." He was definitely a legitimate contender to win his first championship.

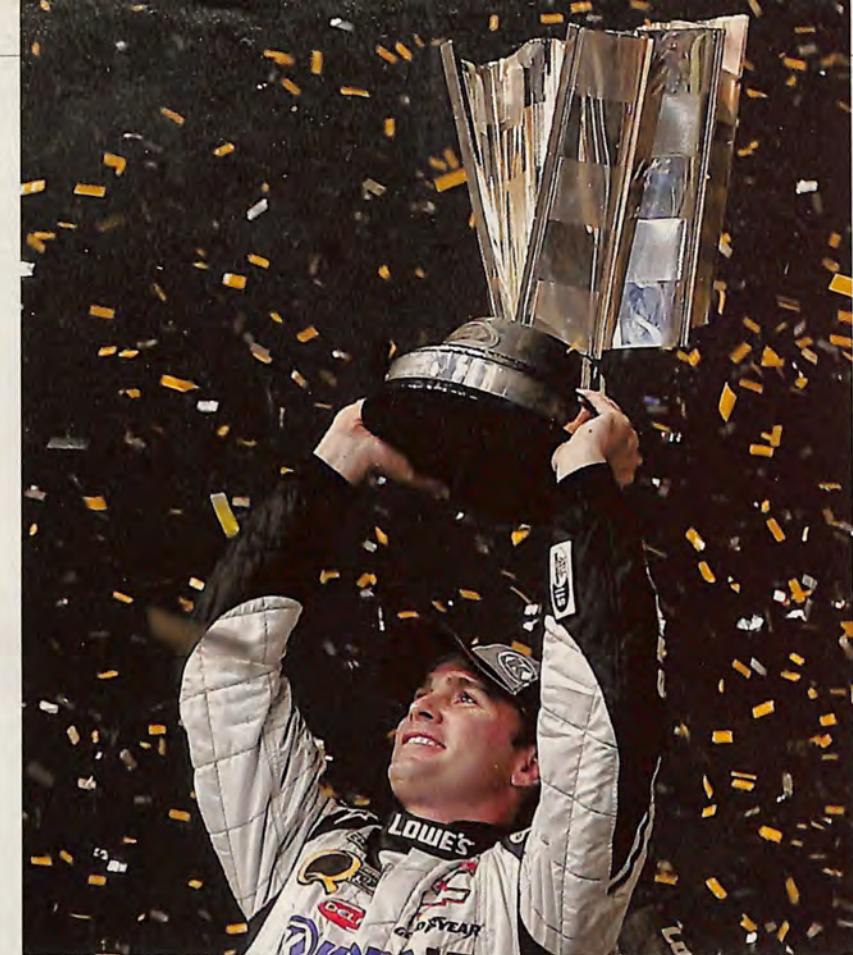
RACE 3

Kansas Speedway. Edwards makes the most memorable move of the 2008 Chase, thundering into the third corner on the final lap in a desperate attempt to pass Johnson for the win. Edwards' Ford bounces off the outside wall—as he knew it would—but he still manages to hold second behind Johnson's Chevy. The duo can't shake Biffle, who runs third. After the race, Johnson leads the Chase by 10 points over Edwards and 30 over Biffle.

► **Rusty's take:** Johnson dominated throughout the day, and we were all watching it in the studio and watching the lap times and watching Carl run him down. That Hail Mary dive he did going into Turn 3 is something that people will remember for a long, long time. To see that, it was like the throttle stuck. That's what it looked like.

RACE 4

Talladega Superspeedway. Johnson's lead expands to 72 points over Edwards and 77 over Biffle after Edwards,



racing in the top five, bump-drafts Biffle on Lap 173, spins his teammate into Kenseth and triggers a wreck that wipes out half the Chase field. Tony Stewart wins the race after rookie Regan Smith, who crosses the finish line first, is demoted to 18th for passing below the yellow line.

► **Rusty's take:** That was a race where Carl Edwards would love to forget what happened there. That was probably his most embarrassing moment. He lost a lot of supporters in his own Roush camp for a moment there when that happened. To go in there and bump-draft Biffle so hard he turns him around, and to take all those other competitors ... every now and then a driver during the year has his not so shining time, and that was the day he wants to forget. Johnson, on the other hand—we were listening to him on his radio—and he said, "Man, I have used up all my luck." That was a race I think everybody wanted to see Regan Smith win. There's a lot of people still that don't agree with that decision.

RACE 5

Lowe's Motor Speedway. Edwards' woes continue when the unheard-of simultaneous failure of both his ignition

Edwards (99) had some great moments during the Chase. Causing this wreck at Talladega wasn't one of them.

Johnson's third straight championship came as no surprise on the final night of the season.

boxes drops him to 33rd, 17 laps down. Johnson runs sixth, and race winner Jeff Burton vaults into second in the Chase, 69 points behind Johnson. Biffle and Edwards are 86 and 168 points back, respectively.

► **Rusty's take:** That was a deal where you never see a mechanical failure like that, and here you see (owner Jack) Roush stuck on pit road trying to figure out what's going on. To see Johnson have an OK day and then to see Carl have a dominating car and have a failure, we thought, as tight as this stuff is, that pretty much puts Carl completely out of it. I think that race is the one where they'll go back and say, "That's where we lost the championship."

RACE 6

Martinsville Speedway. Johnson dominates, leading 339 of 504 laps and beating second-place finisher Dale Earnhardt Jr. by 0.708 seconds. Burton is penalized for pitting outside his stall, finishes 17th and drops to third in the standings, 152 points back. Biffle (who finishes 12th) is 149 behind Johnson, and Edwards, who runs third, is 198 down.

► **Rusty's take:** That was just a runaway by Jimmie all day long. He and his teammate (Jeff) Gordon (who finished fourth) run



so good there it's unreal. That was a real simple race to talk about. He just dominated, the car handled perfect, and the pit stops were flawless.

RACE 7

Atlanta Motor Speedway. Edwards wins the race but learns to his amazement that Johnson has charged through the field after a late pit stop and finished second. Edwards is second in points but trails Johnson by 183, with Biffle and Burton 185 and 218 back, respectively.

► **Rusty's take:** It was incredible how strong Carl ran throughout the day, running right dead on the bottom of the track, running on the top of the track, running all over the track. People were spinning out and crashing and sliding all over the place. Carl dominates all day long, but Jimmie comes down pit road with about 10 laps to go and puts four new tires on and does this banzai run to the front, passing guys like they're sitting still.

RACE 8

Texas Motor Speedway. Edwards finally makes a dent in Johnson's championship lead, winning the

race on fuel mileage even though his car is clearly the class of the field. Johnson struggles to a 15th-place finish and leaves Fort Worth 106 points ahead of Edwards and 143 ahead of Biffle. Burton is 212 back.

► **Rusty's take:** Once again, Carl dominated the race. I actually flew home with Rick Hendrick that night on his airplane, and (Johnson's crew chief) Chad Knaus was on there going, "Wow, we just missed it." And Carl hit it dead-on. That's where you saw some momentum out of Carl. He was like a steamroller blasting his way to the front, and it had me thinking, "Can he keep this momentum going at Phoenix?"

RACE 9

Phoenix International Raceway. With a dominating win from the pole, his fifth victory of the season from the top starting position, Johnson eliminates all other contenders from the championship picture save Edwards, who fights his way from a 15th-place starting position to fourth at the finish. But Edwards is 141 points behind and needs a miracle at Homestead.

► **Rusty's take:** To see Johnson unload, win the pole, dominate,

lead the most laps (217 of 313) and just drive off, it was like, "He's not just doinking around here—he wants to win this thing. And not by guarding his lead. He wants to win it by dominating and running out there in front." That was a very impressive run at Phoenix. You talk about how important qualifying is with these cars being so equal. Edwards qualified 15th and couldn't make it up.

RACE 10

Homestead-Miami Speedway.

Johnson's 30th-place qualifying effort provides a little drama—but not much. After he moves up in the running order and avoids early disaster, he locks up his third straight title with a 15th-place finish. "It's the ultimate reward," he says. Edwards wins the race and leads the most laps but falls 69 points short in his bid for the title.

► **Edwards' take:** Second place in the championship isn't what we came here for, but Jimmie's a great guy, and he deserved to win. We got beat by a true champion. I wish Daytona was starting in 20 minutes. I want to race so bad.

— Reid Spencer

SN's top 5

The guys who could win it in 2009

1. Jimmie Johnson. There's nothing to suggest a drop-off in the performance of the No. 48 team, and with a ban on testing in 2009, you can expect a preservation of the status quo. Translation: Title No. 4.

2. Carl Edwards. Two failures cost Edwards the 2008 title—his at Talladega, his car's at Charlotte. Edwards has speed, aggressiveness and desire on his side.

3. Greg Biffle. Biffle started the Chase with two wins but had none in the first 26 races to boost his points total. Like Edwards, Biffle is only a few minor glitches—and a better performance at Martinsville—away from a championship.

4. Dale Earnhardt Jr. After a year of acclimating to the way things work at Hendrick Motorsports, Junior is ready for a breakout year in 2009. Earnhardt failed to post a top five in the four restrictor plate races this season. Next year he just might win two of them.

5. Kyle Busch. The No. 18 team may have lived the cliche this year: You have to lose one to win one. As soon as the Chase arrived, Busch's Toyota started to come apart and his team bore little resemblance to the outfit that had won eight of the first 26 races. But Busch is enormously talented and still has considerable upside.

— Reid Spencer

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THE FUEL OF NASCAR

NHL

Intermission Interview

with Devils F Zach Parise



It took Parise 24 games to score nine goals last season. This season, he reached that mark in 10 games.

SN: You had nine goals in your first 10 games. How do you explain your fast start?

PARISE: Good linemates. We're getting a lot of good scoring chances every game. We're playing really well together. Hopefully, it will last a little longer.

SN: Do you think you can reach the 40- or even 50-goal plateau this season?

PARISE: I don't know. I sure hope so. We've only played 12 games. But it's definitely something to shoot for.

SN: Do you feel more of an obligation to score, to pick up the slack, with goalie Martin Brodeur out three or four months with an elbow injury?

PARISE: No, not at all. (Kevin Weekes) is a great goalie. We'll be fine. Yeah, it sucks having him out. But we're still a good hockey team. Weekes is very capable of winning a lot of games for us. We'll be fine.

SN: So you don't think the team has to do anything out of the ordinary to compensate for Brodeur's absence?

PARISE: I don't think so. Absolutely not. We're not going to change the way we play. We're not going to play more defensive. We're still pretty confident with the team we have in here.

— Bill Eichenberger

Yesterday's stars answer today's questions

The recent Legends Classic in Toronto during Hall of Fame weekend featured players from all generations. *Sporting News'* Craig Custance grabbed a few of the greats to get their takes on today's game.

The participants

Wendel Clark
former Maple Leafs star
Jacques Demers
Stanley Cup-winning coach
Dale Hawerchuk
Hall of Famer
Lanny McDonald
Hall of Famer
Mark Messier
Hall of Famer
Larry Robinson
Hall of Famer
Darryl Sittler
Hall of Famer



Puck Pulse

Of the players you have seen from other teams this season, who has surprised you the most?

► **Doug Weight, C, Islanders,**

"A younger player who is really going to blossom into a star is (forward) **Zach Parise** of the Devils. He obviously has great tools. But I think he has the makings of being a real complete player. He's very strong on the puck, very gifted, sees the ice well and has a real hunger to be great. He hunts the puck around the net. And, as with most stars, the puck seems to find him. He also creates a lot for himself. He's a great skater and has great instincts for the game."

1 Who is the one current player you would pick to build a franchise around?

Messier: Sidney Crosby

Clark: Vincent Lecavalier

Demers: Sidney Crosby

Robinson: "Martin Brodeur. You always start with your goaltender, and he, along with (Roberto) Luongo, and I like (Ryan) Miller in Buffalo, are good goaltenders. But Marty is at the top of the list."

Hawerchuk: "Rick Nash. He's 6-foot-4, skates like the wind, handles the puck fantastic, and he's an unselfish player."

Sittler: Sidney Crosby

McDonald: Roberto Luongo or Jarome Iginla

2 If you could make one rule change in the NHL, what would it be?

Messier: Mandatory visors

Clark: Get rid of the instigator rule.

Demers: "We have to stop hitting guys from behind, cut the injuries to the head. The NHL has to do something about it before it's too late and act immediately. A player one of these days won't get up."

Hawerchuk: "I'd like to see them get more of a feel for the game as it's happening and not call everything with the stick."

Sittler: "It bothers me that they call every stick foul. Too many penalties."

McDonald: "Make the ice surface a little bit bigger. Not Olympic size, but ... get your buildings to have 6 to 8 more feet of width and the same in distance. Let everyone have a little more room and let talent take over."

3 Which current coach would you like to play for?

Messier: Wayne Gretzky

Clark: "Any coach. You always

respect the coaches. You always play for anyone."

Demers: Mike Babcock

Robinson: Jacques Lemaire

Hawerchuk: "Myself. I coach juniors."

Sittler: "I've never thought of that before. All of them."

4 Where would you put an NHL expansion team?

Messier: Hilton Head, South Carolina

Clark: "Is there really another city that needs a team?"

Demers: "They should go back to Winnipeg. They supported that team for so many years, why not bring another team or two to Canada?"

Robinson: Winnipeg

Hawerchuk: "Do I even have to answer that one? Winnipeg."

Sittler: "Ontario could support another team, no problem."

McDonald: "Everyone talks about two teams in Toronto and would they survive? Absolutely. It would be very interesting, it would be like the New York Yankees and New York Mets."

5 Which player from today's game would fit perfectly in any era?

Messier: "There are so many great players right now, but I'm a big Sidney Crosby fan."

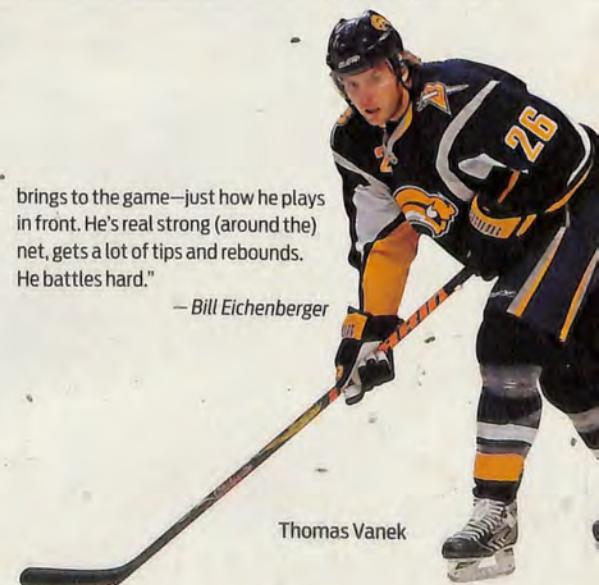
Clark: Alex Ovechkin

Demers: (Vincent) Lecavalier

Robinson: Nicklas Lidstrom

Hawerchuk: "All of them. Good players find a way, no matter what the rules are."

McDonald: "Gary Roberts—the way he keeps on going, he has (played in) all eras when you think about him playing in the '80s, '90s and 2000s."



PARISE: RICH SCHULTZ / AP; GRETZKY: DARRYL DYCK / AP; VANEK: DON HELPPY / AP

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Top five holiday tourneys

►1. **Maui Invitational.** November 24-26, Lahaina Civic Center, Lahaina, Hawaii

Field: Alabama, Chaminade, Indiana, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Oregon, Saint Joseph's, Texas

SN's projected champion: North Carolina

Spotlight on: Texas point guard A.J. Abrams—that's right, point guard—is taking over the offense after two years of lighting it up from 3-point range as D.J. Augustin's backcourt partner. Texas is emphasizing ball screens to take advantage of its frontcourt players' shooting ability and to keep the offense compact for its new playmaker.



In Maui, Abrams will get the chance to prove he can handle the ball as well as he can shoot it.

►2. **Old Spice Classic.** November 27-28, 30, Milk House, Orlando

Field: Gonzaga, Maryland, Tennessee, Michigan State, Oklahoma State, Siena, Wichita State, Georgetown

SN's projected champion: Michigan State

Spotlight on: Tennessee freshman Scotty Hopson, a dynamic wing, will be making his big-time debut for a team that needs extra firepower.

►3. **Puerto Rico Tip-Off.** November 20-21, 23, Coliseo de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Field: Chattanooga, Fairfield, Memphis, Missouri, Seton Hall, USC, Virginia Tech, Xavier

SN's projected champion: USC

Spotlight on: Freshmen Tyreke Evans (Memphis) and DeMar DeRozan (USC) were U.S. teammates last spring at the Hoop Summit in Portland. They could be matched up in a Friday evening semifinal in San Juan.

►4. **Paradise Jam.** November 21-24, UVI Sports and Fitness Center, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Field: Connecticut, Iona, La Salle, Miami, San Diego, Southern Miss, Valparaiso, Wisconsin

SN's projected champion: Connecticut

Spotlight on: UConn and Miami, both ranked in SN's preseason top 15, were placed in the same bracket.

►5. **76 Classic.** November 27-28, 30, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim

Field: Arizona State, Baylor, Cal State Fullerton, Charlotte, Providence, Saint Mary's, UTEP, Wake Forest

SN's projected champion: Wake Forest

Spotlight on: Providence coach Keno Davis is trying to rejuvenate players who were frequently injured and largely unsuccessful last season. Fortunately for him, there is some talent on hand.

—Mike DeCourcy

Holiday tournaments aren't what they used to be, but they're still good enough to offer a nice break from football

By Mike DeCourcy

decourcy@sportingnews.com

Kentucky coach Billy Gillispie's most recent experience in a holiday tournament wasn't particularly pleasant. You remember Gardner-Webb, don't you? Well, he certainly does.

G-W 84, Kentucky 68.

"It was my birthday," Gillispie says. "It wasn't my most happy birthday."

That result got the 2007 2K Sports College Hoops Classic onto the front page of *The New York Times* and into the heavy rotation on *SportsCenter*, even though it occurred during the thick of football season.

That's what the best holiday tournaments accomplish: They focus attention on college basketball long before that big March shindig many view as all that matters. But rule changes, lawsuits, programming decisions and financial considerations have dramatically altered this element of the sport.

The Rainbow Classic (born in 1964) and Great Alaska Shootout (1978) are two of the game's best brand names, but they're dying of old age. The Rainbow never had great TV exposure, and Alaska lost its deal with ESPN over the summer. Neither tournament can attract compelling fields now.

On the mainland, tournaments are proliferating as the result of a 2006 NCAA rule allowing every team 27 games plus one in-season tournament or 29 scheduled games. That change put an end to extended legal action from promoters against the dreaded "2-in-4" rule" that limited teams to playing in two tournaments in a four-year span,

But the decision to offer the option of the extra two scheduled games has had unintended consequences. Now, some programs that had been clamoring to play major powers on neutral courts trade that opportunity to sell themselves as road opponents for guaranteed payouts of as much as \$100,000.

"Before, almost any team would play in a tournament without much hesitation," says Rick Giles, who promotes the 2K Sports tournament and CBE Classic, among others. "Now they're getting financial pressures from their own schools to raise money. Most tournaments cannot afford to pay as much as a guarantee game."

Fairfield coach Ed Cooley is pleased he was not forced to make that choice. But he's not sure how he'll feel after the Stags—14-16 last season

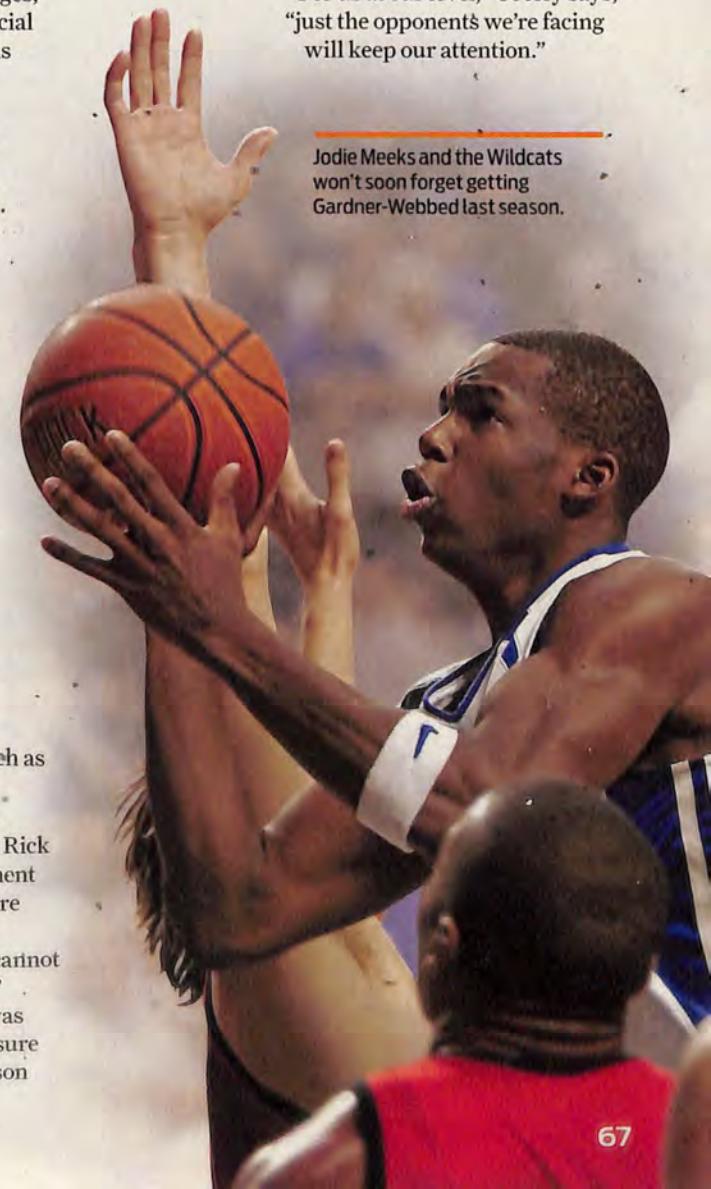
and continuing to rebuild around star point guard Jonathan Han—face the likes of Memphis, Virginia Tech and Missouri at the Puerto Rico Tip-Off.

"It gives us a chance to at least compete in a neutral setting," Cooley says. "It allows our kids some national exposure. I wanted our kids to play in a tournament setting to prepare for our conference tournament in March."

"And there's the team bonding. It's a chance for us early in the year to get away, to face adversity and test our character and our will."

And he is not worried at all about sunny weather and nearby beaches in San Juan distracting his players.

"For us at our level," Cooley says, "just the opponents we're facing will keep our attention."



Jodie Meeks and the Wildcats won't soon forget getting Gardner-Webbed last season.

NBA

Even alongside Shaq, Stoudemire draws a crowd

By Sean Deveney

sdeveney@sportingnews.com

When the Suns traded for center Shaquille O'Neal last February, one of the expected benefits was relief for big man Amare Stoudemire, the target of double-teams nearly every time he got the ball in the low post. He had gotten used to them—Stoudemire averaged 25.2 points on 59.0 percent shooting last season, even as he repeatedly saw two defenders at a time. But, stick a 14-time All-Star center next to him and the double-team problem should disappear.

Hasn't happened. Turns out, defenses fear Stoudemire more than his star teammate, and Stoudemire is still seeing double-teams. And still making plenty of shots, averaging 22.0 points on 57.3 percent shooting. "Double-teams, that has been the whole season so far," Stoudemire says. "That hasn't changed at all. I don't think it will; I just have to fight through them."

Stoudemire also has to fight through Phoenix's plan to keep O'Neal healthy this season. O'Neal has missed an average of 29 games per year over the past three seasons, so the Suns are planning to rest him one game every time they play one of their 18 back-to-backs. The thinking is, O'Neal will sit out a significant part of the season one way or another, but, as general manager Steve Kerr says, "This way, he will miss them on our terms."

That doesn't help Stoudemire much. When O'Neal sits, rookie Robin Lopez—not exactly a feared offensive option—starts, which means opponents zero in on Stoudemire. Factor in new coach Terry Porter's emphasis on the halfcourt game, as well as the eye injury that Stoudemire suffered when he was poked on the second day of camp—"The pain was indescribable," says

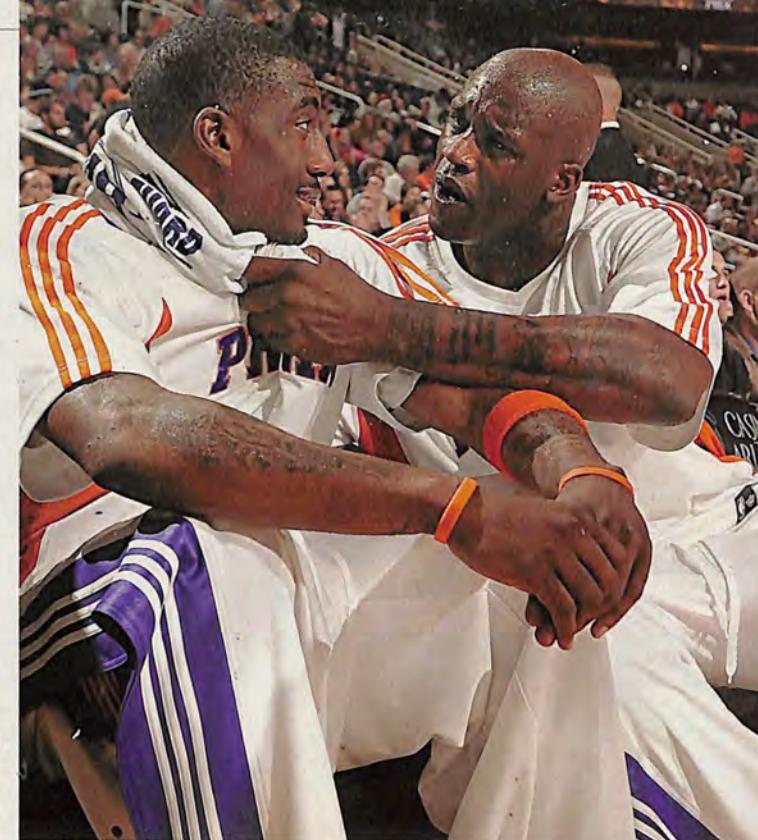
O'Neal (right) may not be drawing defenders away from Stoudemire, but he's willing to dole out a few lessons.

Stoudemire, who wore goggles for the first seven games to protect the eye)—and it all adds up to tremendous pressure on Stoudemire.

O'Neal doesn't seem to mind the lack of attention. "It's been a long time since I did not have to deal with double-teams every time," he says. "My eyes light up when that happens."

O'Neal, not Stoudemire, is the Suns big man with room to roam inside. But that's not to say Stoudemire is receiving no benefit from playing with O'Neal. One key to O'Neal's NBA success has been his ability to pass when double-teams come, and Stoudemire already has received some lessons from the big fella. He is averaging 2.3 assists, after averaging 1.3 entering the season.

"Passing is something I have worked on for this year," Stoudemire says. "I know the double-teams are coming, so I have to recognize them and find the open man. That's something that you have to do if you're going to be a big man in the NBA. Shaq, Tim Duncan, all the best big men are great passers."



The All-Goggles team remains intact

When a training camp poke in the eye led to a partially torn iris, there were reports that Amare Stoudemire might have to wear goggles for the rest of his career. But Stoudemire ditched the specs after seven regular-season games—only a few days after telling SN, "Everybody says they look good. It's Amare Vision. Maybe I can make them look fashionable." Looks like Stoudemire never will be part of our modern-era All-Goggles team, but that squad is not lacking for big men.

► **C Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, 1969-89—19-time all-star, six-time NBA champ, all-time NBA scoring leader.** Started wearing goggles for protection after he was traded from the Bucks to the Lakers before the 1975-76 season.

Abdul-Jabbar says: "They really didn't detract from my game. But every so often I'd be in a game and I'd hear somebody's fingernails click on the surface of the goggles, and I'd be very happy that I had them on."

► **F/C John Salley, 1986-96, 1999-2000—Four-time NBA champ with three different teams.** Wore goggles during the final half of his career, for better eyesight and protection.

Salley says: "I didn't care (how they looked)."

► **PF Horace Grant, 1987-2004—One-time all-star, four-time NBA champ.** Began wearing goggles during the 1990-91 season to correct a vision problem.

► **PF Buck Williams, 1981-98—Three-time all-star, 10.0-rebound career average.** Wore goggles for about three years during the middle of his career after suffering an eye injury in the 1990 playoffs.

Williams says: "It feels like you are playing the game inside a bubble. It took a while to adjust."

► **SF James Worthy, 1982-94—Seven-time all-star, three-time NBA champ.** Began wearing goggles after suffering a severe eye injury during the 1984-85 season.

— Sean Deveney, Erin Farrell, Steve Greenberg

My pet move: A quick first step out of the triple-threat position

By Nuggets SF Carmelo Anthony



You have to know how they're playing you, really. I think a defender tells you what move to do. If you only have one move, then you're in trouble. You've got to have countermoves. You've got to have a second move and a third move. Being in the triple-threat position, it gives you options. You can shoot, you can jab, you can drive—it just gives you several different options.

One of the most important things when

you're in the triple-threat is a quick first step. The most explosive guys, their first step is lightning-quick. The way I play, that first dribble, regardless of what it is, sets the defender up. The defender is wondering what you're going to do. When you take that dribble, they don't know if you're going to pull up, if you're going to drive, so you can use it to your advantage.

— As told to Benson Taylor

You don't have to be tough to coach—but it helps



Reggie Miller

It's a player's game, right? We hear that all the time. The players make the dough, get the commercials and get the recognition when things are running smoothly.

But as soon as there is a bump in the road, everyone points fingers at the coach. *He's too demanding, he doesn't understand me, he's lost touch with the game.* I played for some tough coaches during my 18-year career, many of whom, at times,

pushed me to say similar things—coaches like Hall of Famer Jack Ramsay, who drafted me out of UCLA, and Larry Brown, who taught me how to sacrifice to win.

In honor of all the tough coaches, past and present, *Sporting News* asked me to rank the five toughest coaches in today's NBA. They may rub some people the wrong way, but, as any genie will tell you, your dreams won't come true unless you rub that bottle.

1. Michael Curry, Pistons. He had never coached in the NBA before, but there's something Curry mentioned in his introductory press conference that got my attention: *accountability*. The Pistons have been to the East finals six years in a row, but lately they seemed to be stuck in quicksand. Enter Curry, who might not get them back to the conference finals but will have the veterans' attention in the huddle.

2. Scott Skiles, Bucks. Having played with Scott my first two seasons, I knew exactly what type of coach he was going to be: annoying. I mean this in a good way. Scott was an in-your-face kind of player. If you ran the wrong play or missed an assignment on defense, he was going to call you out. Skiles took the Bulls to three consecutive postseason appearances but was fired after a 9-16 start last year. With the Bucks, Skiles has a chance to build another team from the ground up. Let's hope this one listens a little longer.

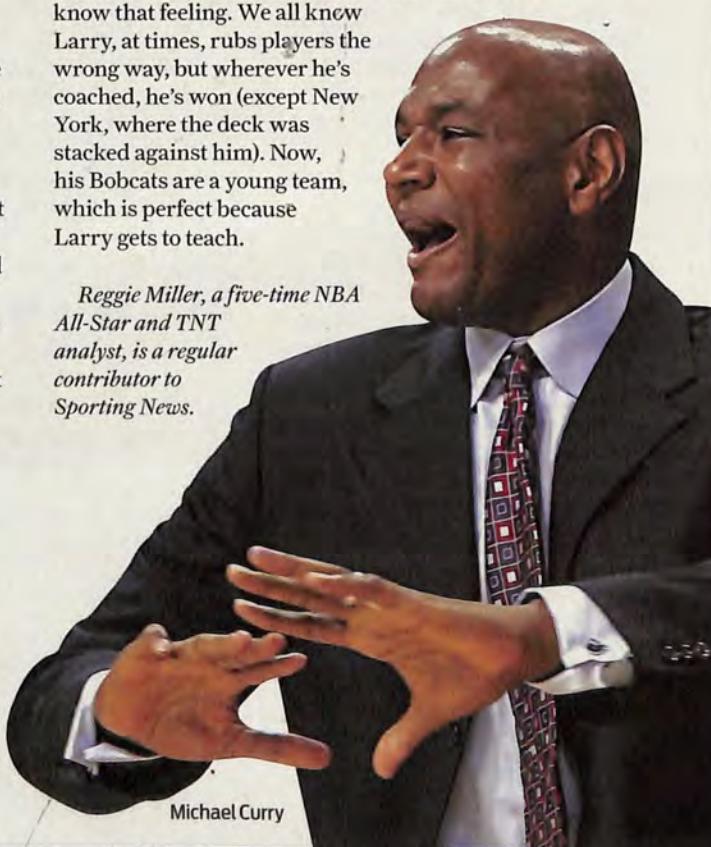
3. Jerry Sloan, Jazz. Any coach who can last 21 years with the same team must have championships and coach of the year awards, right? Sloan has none of either, and that's a crime. Having played against his better teams, I can tell you, he was always prepared and his teams always played with a

sense of urgency. Whoever is doing the voting this year, take a long hard look at a man who has paid his dues.

4. Gregg Popovich, Spurs. I think every player with more than eight years in the league would love to play for Pop. He pushes his younger players (i.e., Tony Parker) and motivates his veterans with enough head games that they are ready to run through a wall for him. It's no secret why he's one of only five coaches with four championships. This season will be a huge test for Popovich, with Manu Ginobili and Parker dealing with ankle injuries.

5. Larry Brown, Bobcats. I don't know if my career would have taken off if not for Coach Brown. Were there moments when he had me befuddled, confused and perplexed? Yes. I'm sure Danny Manning, David Robinson and Allen Iverson know that feeling. We all know Larry, at times, rubs players the wrong way, but wherever he's coached, he's won (except New York, where the deck was stacked against him). Now, his Bobcats are a young team, which is perfect because Larry gets to teach.

Reggie Miller, a five-time NBA All-Star and TNT analyst, is a regular contributor to *Sporting News*.



Michael Curry

Even though he's not playing, Marbury still can play



Something is keeping Marbury on the bench, but it's not a lack of skills.

Theories abound for the Knicks' decision to bury Stephon Marbury on the inactive list: His teammates don't like him. He has a carryover feud with Mike D'Antoni from their days in Phoenix. He isn't in the franchise's future. The Knicks are waiting for him to do something dumb so they can get out of the \$21.9 million he's owed.

But in a league where talent usually matters more than good sense, one reason that hasn't been used for Marbury's seasonlong run of DNPs: a lack of ability. According to four (out of four) executives and scouts asked by *Sporting News*, Marbury, 31, still has game, even though he hasn't been a regular starter since two seasons ago.

Is he good enough to start?

- "He can still play ... and I mean start."
- "He's talented enough to start for a handful of teams."
- "He is not the same player he was because he's lost quickness and explosiveness, but he's good enough to start for a number of teams, though not good teams."
- "He might have lost something, but he's in the same ballpark as he was."

Then what's the problem?

- "Chris Duhon is a true point guard. Marbury is a score-first point guard. You want a point guard who moves the ball; passing is contagious."
- "My issue with guys like him is the often-overlooked aspect of distractions and chemistry. Marbury is not a subtle player. He dominates the ball. He pounds the blood out of it. It's hard to play with guys like that."
- "You have to look at the big picture. Would he accept a different role at this stage of his career? Maybe, but they don't seem willing to take that chance."
- "I feel bad for the guy. They say they don't want to play him because he's not part of their future. He should get Mardy Collins' minutes because he's a better fit for their system than Collins. And why does Malik Rose get minutes? I don't see him as part of the future."

— Stan McNeal

Thompson is the rookie you never saw coming

There was a good deal of head-scratching on draft night when the Kings used their No. 12 overall pick on 6-11 forward Jason Thompson, projected to be a late first-rounder. The choice seemed to come out of nowhere.

"No, it came out of Rider," says Tommy Dempsey, Thompson's college coach. "Not nowhere."

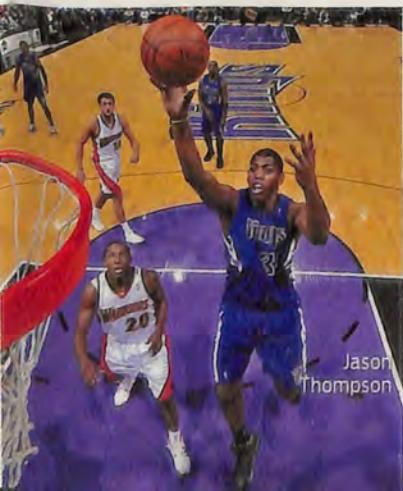
Because Rider isn't in a big-time conference, Thompson was overlooked by the mock-draft crowd. But the Kings liked that Rider is such a small school—and that Thompson put up gaudy numbers despite being the focus of every opponent's defense.

Now, in his rookie season, he is vindicating Sacramento with averages of 11.7 points and 6.5 rebounds in only 24.8

minutes and is one of only four players drafted in the top 12 who are starting.

"There's an advantage to playing in a mid-major league," Dempsey says. "Jason got used to being the focus of the defense. I watch him now, and it's easier for him ... He's playing with more space than he's ever had."

— Sean Devaney



Jason Thompson

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Hey, champs, how about a conference title game?

The debate is hotter than ever: Is it fair that half of the BCS conferences play championship games, while the others won't take the risk?

Sporting News asked the commissioners of two leagues without a title tilt—the Big Ten's Jim Delany and Pac-10's Tom Hansen—to explain the positives and negatives of conference championship games:

THE GOOD

Hansen: "It's like a bowl game within your conference. It's another national television game to highlight your conference, and, of course, it's a way to generate revenue."

Delany: "If you play in it and win it, it can help. It helped LSU last year vault all the way from (No. 7) to the top two. It's at the end of the season, when it has more impact."

THE BAD

Hansen: "Our people don't want to divide into two divisions. We're the only conference that plays round-robin. We like our championship decided on the field, with everyone playing everyone. It's very important for all of our members to play in Los Angeles for exposure and the recruiting market. It's also counterproductive when you're trying to get a team in the national title game and other BCS games. We prefer not to have that extra jeopardy for those teams."

Delany: "The big issue is it would impact a series of games that have a lot of equity and tradition. With Michigan and Ohio State, we have two institutions who strongly feel that game should be on the last week of the Big Ten season. It's not just that game; there are people who would feel a championship game would undermine the tradition of the league and those type of games."

— Matt Hayes



The Big Ten seems to prefer the tradition of Michigan-Ohio State to a title game.

Penn State's Williams is back with 'a bang'

By Dave Curtis
dcurtis@sportingnews.com

On a chilly Saturday in Iowa, Penn State senior Derrick Williams stood alone in the shotgun. Already a receiver, a tailback and a returner, Williams would be featured again, this time at quarterback in a Wild Lion formation. In all, he'd touch the ball 20 times against the Hawkeyes, doing everything from running for a touchdown to throwing a 23-yard pass down the seam to Mickey Shuler.

Despite the fact the Nittany Lions lost the game and their undefeated season, Williams says, "I feel really good about the stuff we're doing now."

But that wasn't always his sentiment. Despite a strong career that he began by helping his team get to a BCS bowl game and should end with another one, Williams' production dipped as a sophomore and junior when Penn State shifted back toward its familiar dropback passing game. On offense last season, he averaged less than six touches per game in a more pro-style scheme with quarterback Anthony Morelli at the helm.

"Many times, I'd be watching games," says Rick Houchens, Williams' coach at Roosevelt High in Maryland, "and I'd want to throw a brick through the television."

The dichotomy that has shaped Williams' career makes his legacy curious. He arrived in Happy Valley as the nation's top-rated recruit and became, along with classmate and current St. Louis Rams rookie cornerback Justin King, the poster child for a resurgent Penn State program. Williams will depart as one of the program's all-time top playmakers. But he lacks the recognition that would seem to accompany such a description—he has no All-Big Ten accolades and no national individual awards and hasn't gotten a whiff of Heisman Trophy attention.

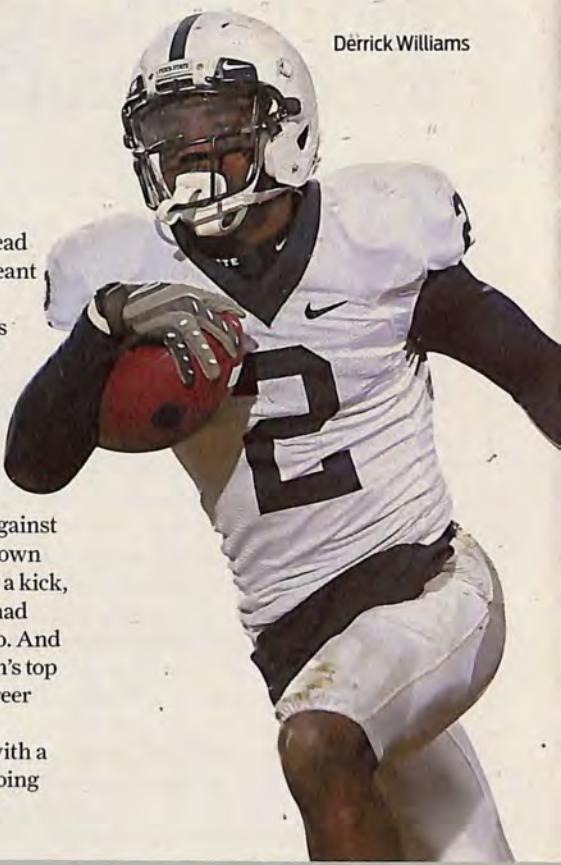
This spring, with more mobile quarterback Daryll Clark taking over as the starter, PSU's coaching

staff elected to include more spread principles in its scheme. That meant a lot more of Williams.

"There are just so many things he can do when he gets the ball," quarterbacks coach Jay Paterno says. "It's a priority for us to get him involved."

The results have shown up on highlight reels. His biggest day came in the Big Ten opener against Illinois, when he scored a touchdown rushing, receiving and returning a kick, something no Penn State player had achieved under coach Joe Paterno. And with Penn State among the nation's top teams, Williams' topsy-turvy career could end in the Rose Bowl.

"I know he wanted to go out with a bang," King says. "I think he's doing that with an exclamation point."



They were No. 1 for a reason

When it comes to projecting who the No. 1 recruit is, Rivals.com has had more hits than misses. Editor-in-chief Bobby Burton tells *Sporting News* what separated the website's past 10 top picks, including Derrick Williams, from the rest of the class.



Year	No. 1 recruit	High school	College
2008	Terrelle Pryor, QB	Jeannette (Pa.)	Ohio State
A quarterback in the mold of Vince Young, he's a superior athlete with an internal desire to be special.			
2007	Jimmy Clausen, QB	Oaks Christian (Westlake Village, Calif.)	Notre Dame
He was probably the most mechanically polished high school thrower I've ever seen.			
2006	Percy Harvin, WR	Landstown (Virginia Beach, Va.)	Florida
He had 476 yards of total offense in the state championship game as a junior.			
2005	Derrick Williams, WR	Eleanor Roosevelt (Greenbelt, Md.)	Penn State
He mostly played quarterback and running back for his high school team, which ran a lot of option; he projected as an elite receiver or corner.			
2004	Adrian Peterson, RB	Palestine (Texas)	Oklahoma
Some No. 1 guys you debate over, but not Adrian. He had everything you could want from a running back.			
2003	Ernie Sims, LB	North Florida Christian (Tallahassee, Fla.)	Florida State
He was one of the most physically impressive players I've ever seen on the high school level.			
2002	Vince Young, QB	Madison (Houston)	Texas
If you saw what Young did to USC in the Rose Bowl, imagine his athleticism against high schoolers.			
2001	Kevin Jones, RB	Cardinal O'Hara (Springfield, Pa.)	Virginia Tech
He had good size and toughness, but what set him apart was his legit high-end speed.			
2000	D.J. Williams, LB	De La Salle (Concord, Calif.)	Miami
He is considered the best player ever at De La Salle, the nation's best high school program of the era.			
1999	T.J. Duckett, RB	Loy Norrix (Kalamazoo, Mich.)	Michigan State
He was an elite athlete who always projected better as a 3-4 inside linebacker to me.			

It may look like it on the field, but Rice's record holders can't read each other's minds

By Derek Samson
dsamson@sportingnews.com

Individually, Rice quarterback Chase Clement and receiver Jarett Dillard have established themselves as among the best at their positions. Together, though, they are unmatched in NCAA history.

Clement and Dillard, both fifth-year seniors, have connected for an NCAA-record 48 career touchdowns. They've spent five seasons—and offseasons—together, and by now, each can read the other's every glance.

But how well do they really know each other?

What's Chase's favorite play?

Jarett says: A dropback pass where he scrambles out of the pocket and picks a receiver, or he'll just run the ball.

Chase says: The skinny post.

What's Jarett's favorite play?

Chase says: The fade.

Jarett says: Fade route.

What's Chase's biggest pet peeve on the field?

Jarett says: When that rusher comes through the line or off the edge and gives him a nice one on the chin.

Chase says: A three-and-out.

What's Jarett's biggest pet peeve on the field?

Chase says: Probably when the DBs are 10 yards off and we don't check into something quick like a hitch. Or, not checking into a fade.

Jarett says: When I drop a pass and it's nobody's fault but mine.

What's Chase's biggest pet peeve off the field?

Jarett says: When he can't hit the ball right in golf. I'm telling you, when he's messing up in golf, he turns into another man.

Chase says: Three-putting in golf.

What's Jarett's biggest pet peeve off the field?

Chase says: Losing to me in pingpong.

Jarett says: Not getting enough sleep.

What would Chase say has been your best TD?

Jarett says: His favorite completion would probably be against the University of Texas-El Paso last year, and he was scrambling around, and he found me at the back of the end zone to tie the game.

Chase says: One of two game-winners in 2006. Either the double-OT pass against Tulsa or the TD vs. UAB with 3 seconds left.

What would Jarett say has been your best TD?

Chase says: The one that broke the record against North Texas.

Jarett says: A fade route against East Carolina in 2006.

What does Chase think is the key to you guys clicking as a combination?

Jarett says: Long summer workouts at his high school and my high school as redshirt freshmen.

Chase says: Time put in during the offseason.

What does Jarett think is the key to you guys clicking as a combination?

Chase says: Time we've spent together and staying after practice.

Jarett says: Hard work, practice and the continuity that comes with five years.

What would Chase blame for an incompletion when throwing to you?

Jarett says: Double coverage.

Chase says: Usually, a little miscommunication.

What would Jarett blame for an incompletion when you throw to him?

Chase says: He'd probably blame it on me—say I missed the throw.

Jarett says: Double coverage.

In one word, how would Chase describe playing with you?

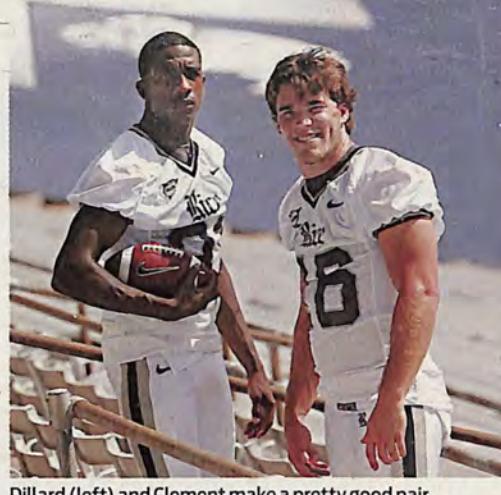
Jarett says: Awesome. That's one of his words.

Chase says: Special.

In one word, how would Jarett describe playing with you?

Chase says: Fun.

Jarett says: Phenomenal.



Dillard (left) and Clement make a pretty good pair.

Matt Hayes' crystal ball

Why wait till January to see how the rest of the season will shake out? Five predictions:

1. The BCS decides who plays in the national championship game not once but twice. The three-way tie in the Big 12 South—forced by Oklahoma's win over Texas Tech—is broken by the BCS standings, and Texas edges the Sooners. Texas then beats Missouri in the Big 12 title game and advances to the national title game.

2. Two years ago, a blocked kick (on a field goal attempt vs. South Carolina) kept Florida in the national title hunt. This time around, a blocked kick (on an extra point attempt vs. Ole Miss) can't keep the nation's hottest team from playing for its second national title in three seasons.

3. Florida wins out, Alabama wins out, and the Gators beat the Tide for the fourth time in six tries in the SEC championship game.

4. Oregon State wins out and secures the league's Rose Bowl bid. BYU beats Utah and Nevada beats Boise State, setting up the best BCS games in the 11-year history of the series: Florida vs. Texas in the national title game, USC vs. Oklahoma in the Fiesta Bowl, Alabama vs. Ohio State in the Sugar Bowl. Meanwhile, Penn State and Oregon State play a rematch in the Rose, and Miami and Cincinnati play in the Orange Bowl.

5. The three Big 12 quarterbacks steal one another's votes in the Heisman Trophy race, and Florida's Tim Tebow rides a huge November and December to become only the second player to win the award twice.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Nate Davis, Ball State junior quarterback

The numbers: Davis ranks eighth among Division I-A quarterbacks in passing efficiency. He has completed 68.2 percent of his passes for 2,647 yards and 20 TDs and has six interceptions. The numbers that matter the most, though, are 10-0. Davis has guided the Cardinals to a perfect record and into the top 20.

Did you know ... Davis always wears gloves and does not grip the ball on the laces

because he thinks his fingers are too fat to get a good grip there. Also, he operated exclusively from the shotgun in high school.

What's on tap: The Cardinals will try to wrap up a perfect regular season on November 25 against Western Michigan.

What they're saying: "Ball State has a great quarterback. Not a good quarterback, a great one." —Northern Illinois coach Jerry Kill

—Derek Samson

DILLARD AND CLEMENT: SHARON STEINMANN / HOUSTON CHRONICLE; DAVIS: AJ MAST / AP

Wrangler

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Legends' Corner

We posed "What If?" questions to members of the Legends Football Coaches Association on topics that have become major story lines this season.

Q: What if Terrelle Pryor had gone to Michigan instead of Ohio State?

A: Michigan obviously doesn't have a QB that can run the spread offense, so Pryor would definitely help out in this situation. Michigan needs more than Pryor to get that program back on track. Ohio State would still be a very good team with (Todd) Boeckman at QB.

—John Cooper, former Ohio State coach



Pryor would have been a good fit at Michigan, but he wouldn't have solved all the Wolverines' problems.

Q: What if Auburn had never switched offenses and kept everything as it was last season?

A: I don't know whether changing offenses is where the problem lies. You could say that. Our quarterbacks are inexperienced, we don't have a big-play wide receiver, the running backs have been average, probably due more to minor injuries, and the kicking game has been questionable.

—Pat Dye, former Auburn coach

Q: What if Rick Neuheisel had not been forced out at Washington before 2003 and the program had been more stable over the six seasons since?

A: Rick can coach and had a good staff when he was here. But when the publicity starts happening and the press gets on it, the negative recruiting starts. But if you could eliminate all that and there would have been no problems, there is no question our program would be in a lot better shape. You need (continuity) so much. It's just disruptive when you change—it's hiring a whole new staff, and then you're really behind.

—Don James, former Washington coach

Get more from the coaches in Sporting News Today, at sportingnews.com and at legendschannel.com.

Boise State puts the blue in blueprint

The Broncos' success is the result of a carefully constructed long-term plan

By Dave Curtis
dcurtis@sportingnews.com

Athletic directors Mike Roth and Gene Bleymaier have never compared notes on the Pacific Northwest sports miracles they have presided over. But Roth's Gonzaga men's basketball team and Bleymaier's Boise State football squad have employed similar models to rise from nice stories to midlevel national powers. "There are definitely some parallels there," Roth says.

Gonzaga has reached 10 straight NCAA basketball tournaments, advancing at least one round in seven of them, and is a top 10 team as this season starts. Boise State has the best winning percentage (.103-24, .811) in Division I-A football over the past 10 years and began 2008 second to Oklahoma in victories (90) dating to the 2000 season.

A peek at Boise's blueprint for success among the big boys and how it compares to Gonzaga's:

► **Continuity:** When Dan Monson left Gonzaga after the 1999 season to coach Minnesota, Roth bumped up top assistant Mark Few to keep the program rolling. At Boise State, Bleymaier followed suit twice. He hired assistant Dan Hawkins to replace Dirk Koetter when Koetter left for Arizona State after the 2000 season. When Hawkins left for Colorado five years later, Bleymaier gave the job to assistant Chris Petersen.

"Continuity is great, provided it's the right people," Roth says. "Mark has made it work here. As an outsider looking in, it looks like Chris has done a great job for them."

► **Recruiting:** Gonzaga once built a squad of players from the Pacific Northwest, but its success has spread its recruiting halfway across the country, with players from Texas and Chicago dotting this year's roster.

Boise State's coaches say the team is in the thick of battles for most of the top local talent in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California. Beating Oklahoma in

the Fiesta Bowl after the 2006 season extended the program's reach, and the Broncos' brand carries weight in Texas and even Florida. But the program remains stocked with players deemed too small or slow for a major conference.

"We don't get hung up a ton on whether a linebacker is 5-10 or not," defensive coordinator Justin Wilcox says.

► **Scheduling:** Wins are especially vital for non-BCS schools in football, so Boise State's scheduling errs on the soft side. For five years running, the Broncos have stuck to a template of hosting a I-A team, playing an opponent from the Pac-10 (Oregon, Oregon State or Washington) and facing two I-A teams from non-BCS conferences. The lone exception came in 2005, when the Broncos visited Georgia for the season opener.

Gonzaga, which needed a strong schedule to break into college basketball's elite and improve its NCAA Tournament seeding, takes the opposite approach and loads up on tough nonleague opponents (Connecticut, Memphis, Tennessee and Indiana this season).

Though the philosophies differ, both schools use their sport's systems to their advantage.

► **Playing style:** Great guard play and superb 3-point shooting lifted the early Gonzaga squads to prominence. Boise

State, which entered the season averaging the most points in Division I-A this decade, also scores with flair—the hook-and-ladder tying touchdown and game-winning Statue of Liberty 2-point play against Oklahoma rank among the sport's most amazing moments.

Even this season, BSU continues to tinker with its offense, using a mixture of no-huddle and drain-the-clock tempos and a variety of formations. Against Utah State, two quarterbacks and two receivers threw touchdown passes. "We've always been evolving," offensive coordinator Bryan Harsin says. "We try to do things differently, and we're not opposed to changing it up from game to game."

► **Marketing:** A few upsets and a few postseason highlights and Gonzaga and Boise State jerseys started popping up nationwide. But the Broncos have two unique advantages—Bleymaier's decision to install blue turf on the football field and a geographic area full of sports fans without a local major professional team to love.

"They've done a great job of capturing Boise," Roth says. "Like we've tried to do, Boise

State has found a niche that really works for them."



Like a lot of Boise State's players, Kellen Moore wasn't a five-star recruit. But he has led the Broncos to a perfect mark this season.

Coaching carousel

Four big jobs just waiting for the right person to fill them



CLEMSON

Last 10-win season: 1990 (10-2)

Tommy Bowden's record in 9½ seasons: 72-45 (.615)

► **Best part of the job:** The ACC Atlantic is not exactly the Big 12 South. None of its members—Clemson, Boston College, Florida State, Maryland, N.C. State, Wake Forest—has won a BCS bowl in nine years. "They're in an easy league," says former Alabama coach Gene Stallings. But despite a slew of five-star skill-position players and a stadium that's the envy of the conference, Clemson hasn't finished first in the ACC since 1991.

► **Worst part of the job:** At the Esso Club, a popular campus watering hole, they still talk about Terry Kinard, Perry Tuttle and the rest of Danny Ford's 1981 national title team. It's BCS or bust in Death Valley, as Tommy Bowden learned the hard way when he was fired halfway through this season with eight bowl berths in nine-plus years. "Everyone wants to duplicate that ('81) season," says Bobby Carroll, coach at South Pointe High in Rock Hill, S.C. "Anywhere eight, nine wins doesn't satisfy people, you know it's a football town."

► **Priority No. 1:** Hit the recruiting trail. Bowden's exit left Clemson with just eight commitments in a class Rivals.com ranks No. 36.

Alumni endorsement Leroy Hill, Seahawks linebacker



Hill's pick: Rich Rodriguez, head coach, Michigan: "I know he's struggling at Michigan. But the year before I got there, he was at Clemson as the O-coordinator and they had a pretty good offense."



KANSAS STATE

Last 10-win season: 2003 (11-4)

Ron Prince's record in three seasons: 16-20 (.444)

► **Best part of the job:** "The administration deems athletics extremely important to the university," says K-State legend Bill Snyder, who took the program once considered college football's lousiest to unimaginable heights. The Wildcats mean business—or at least sound like they do. Athletic director Bob Krause promises "a commitment to rebuilding the program to the prominence it enjoyed in the decade of the '90s and beyond."

► **Worst part of the job:** How much do Wildcats fans miss Snyder? When asked by SN whom he'd like to see get the job, K-State great Lynn Dickey said "either Bill Snyder or Gary Patterson." A Kansas City columnist added that a Snyder return "makes a lot of sense." Snyder set the bar so high—he posted six 11-win seasons in one seven-year span—that his successor, Ron Prince,

didn't make it three seasons despite two upsets of Texas and an upgrade in the team's academic performance. If Snyder, 69, chooses to remain retired, bank on some bummed-out fans. They've already forgotten that Snyder was 9-13 in his last two seasons.

► **Priority No. 1:** Convince quarterback Josh Freeman that he should stick around for his senior season.

Alumni endorsement Darren Sproles, Chargers running back



Sproles' pick: Michael Smith, inside receivers coach, Arizona: "He was my running backs coach at Kansas State. He would bring the option back. That's what we're missing. We don't run enough. They want to throw it every down now."



TENNESSEE

Last 10-win season: 2007 (10-4)

Phillip Fulmer's record in 17 seasons: 150-52 (.743)



► **Best part of the job:** Hey Johnny, want to be the next Peyton Manning or Jason Witten? Then come to Knoxville, where you too can make it big in the NFL. Thirty-four ex-Vols were on 2008 opening day NFL rosters. "I remember growing up and hearing about Wide Receiver U, Running Back U and Quarterback U," says former Vols quarterback Tee Martin. "Tennessee is one of the schools where a lot of players (at a lot of positions) come from."

► **Worst part of the job:** The next coach will likely have to travel to enemy territory to land the next Albert Haynesworth (South Carolina) or Jamal Lewis (Georgia). "The recruiting base is not very good," says George Quarles, coach of perennial prep power Maryville (Tenn.) High. Of Rivals.com's top 250 prospects, just three call Tennessee home. Meanwhile, Florida and Georgia rarely have to leave their back yards to fill their recruiting classes.

► **Priority No. 1:** "You can't win in any tough league without a quarterback that produces," says former Arkansas coach Frank Broyles, who's not sure if sophomore Nick Stephens is the answer.

Alumni endorsement Albert Haynesworth, Titans defensive tackle



Haynesworth's pick: Jon Gruden, head coach, Buccaneers: "I heard they wanted to get (Steve) Spurrier, but I don't know about that. They need a new wrinkle, kind of how (Alabama did with) Nick Saban."



WASHINGTON

Last 10-win season: 2000 (11-1)

Ty Willingham's record in four seasons: 11-35 (.239)

Alumni endorsement Lawyer Milloy, Falcons safety



Milloy's pick: Gary Pinkel, head coach, Missouri: "I really like what he's done with Missouri's program. He was a guy that was there when we were going through our most successful years under Don James. He's a guy I met. You can just tell that he bleeds purple and gold."

► **Best part of the job:** You're not replacing Don James. The Huskies have been early-'90s Seahawks—bad the past five years under Keith Gilbertson and Tyrone Willingham, going 6-34 in Pac-10 play. A .500 record would be progress, major progress—and qualify the program for a bowl, something that hasn't happened since 2003. "It's amazing to see how far it's fallen," says longtime NFL quarterback Mark Brunell, a proud ex-Husky.

► **Worst part of the job:** This isn't a quick fix. "Because of our team strength, we are no doubt a couple of years away from competing for the championship," admits James, who coached UW to the 1991 national title.

► **Priority No. 1:** Close the state borders to Oregon, which stole Jonathan Stewart, and other Pac-10 rivals, like they were in the old days. "Many recruiters would come

through here and say there used to be a fence around the state," says Mat Taylor, head coach at Skyline High in the Seattle suburbs. "They need to get back to that."

—Jeff D'Alessio, Brian McLaughlin

NFL

Triangulating the QB carousel three months later: They're 3-for-3



John Elway

When the Packers-Jets-Dolphins quarterback love triangle was exposed early in training camp, there sure were a lot of broken hearts and a lot of bitter and angry people on all sides. Brett

Favre had been jilted by the Packers, who tossed him aside for the younger Aaron Rodgers. With Favre on the market for the first time in 16 years, the Jets were quick to dump their longtime QB partner, Chad Pennington, and go for the supermodel, Favre. Everybody living happily ever after seemed impossible, but when the quarterback carousel stopped, all three guys were dropped off in perfect locations.

Rodgers in Green Bay. We all knew the Favre-Packers breakup wouldn't be fun, but we never figured it'd turn ugly like it did. After such a long marriage, there was going to be an awkward transition to a new QB no matter what, but the camp soap opera was off-the-charts bizarre and nasty. Rodgers, from the jump, handled everything with class—even when zealot fans booed him at practice.

The Packers have had an uneven year, but that's not Rodgers' fault. He has fit in and performed at a high level, even through all the B.S. about Brett. He's a bright spot in a 5-5 season. The Packers might miss Favre's leadership, but they sure don't miss some of his harebrained throws and don't miss the turnovers. Rodgers has proved he can lead the team. If Green Bay can shore up its problems along the offensive line and on defense, this is a playoff team.

Favre in New York. I'm sure Brett would rather be in Green Bay, but he has found peace in the New York spotlight. He is getting to play, which was Priority 1 for him, and is playing well. He has brought a lot of leadership and confidence to his new team. That team now has a swagger. You saw it in the big win at New England. Even when the Patriots rallied late to force overtime, you never saw the Jets panic.

Favre has revitalized the Jets, 7-3 and in first place of the AFC East. You

know owner Woody Johnson is happy because a bounce-back season has reinvigorated the fan base as the team tries to sell luxury boxes and personal seat licenses for a new stadium. And you know coach Eric Mangini is happy. Favre's ability to stretch the field has created more space for running back Thomas Jones, and Favre is developing chemistry with wideout Jerricho Cotchery and tight end Dustin Keller.

Pennington in Miami. He had the most reason to be bitter. After eight years in New York, Pennington was cast aside just as the team spent significant money to upgrade the offensive line and the defense. It actually was good for Pennington to get out of New York, where fans always seemed to make him the scapegoat.

Pennington, 32, dropped into a perfect situation with the Dolphins. Bill Parcells has never needed an all-star QB. He just wants a guy who provides leadership and doesn't turn the ball over. The stability Pennington provides is a prime reason the Dolphins have rebounded from a 1-15 season and are in playoff contention at 6-4. All of Joey Porter's sacks and loud talk would mean nothing if not for Pennington's steady hand.

John Elway, a Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

SN Players Poll

Sporting News asked 60 veteran offensive players about the guys they hate to play against

Which player is the toughest to game-plan for?

Leading vote-getters

Albert Haynesworth, Titans	13
Troy Polamalu, Steelers	5
DeMarcus Ware, Cowboys	5
Ray Lewis, Ravens	4

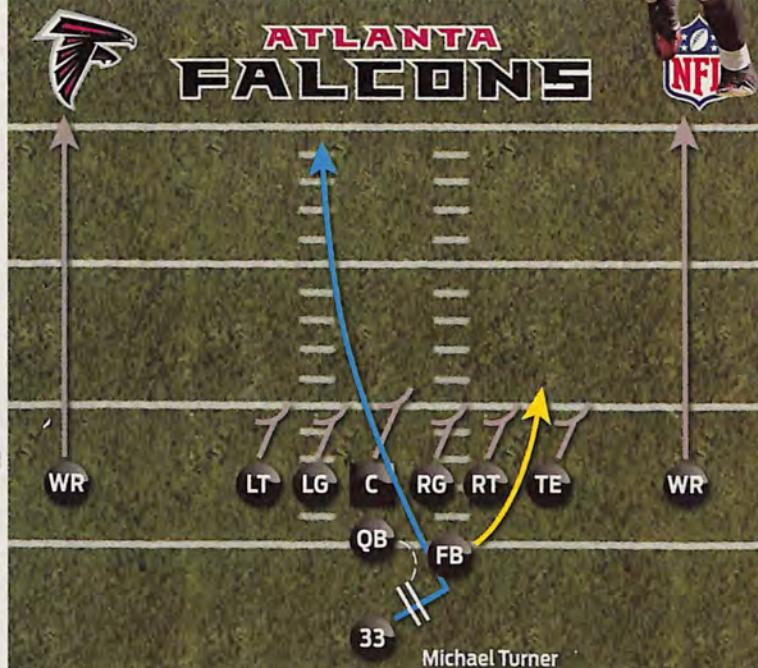
Survey says: The Titans' success on defense is largely the result of their mastodon in the middle. Haynesworth (6-6, 320) commands double-teams—and routinely defeats them—and wrecks running games. Haynesworth's sheer power makes him one of the best inside pass rushers, too—and he was second among defensive tackles with six sacks through Week 10.

My favorite play

By Falcons RB Michael Turner



The Falcons call it: 40 Inside Zone Slant
You know it as: A cutback run



Michael Turner

I've had a lot of success on inside zone slant runs. That was a big play for me when I was in San Diego, and my 66-yard touchdown run against the Lions in the opener came on an inside zone run. The line was able to push everybody to one side, and I just cut back.

What I like about this play is I can pick which way to go. There's no specific hole I have to go in, and I can run to either side.

During my days in San Diego, running behind (fullback) Lorenzo (Neal) was always successful. But my big plays came on inside zone run plays. We would just stretch it and set it up for the cutback, or I could keep it play side.

It's a good fit because the defense is not predicated where I'm going. I try to make the defense not be right.

—As told to D. Orlando Ledbetter

Who is the best run-stuffing lineman?

Leading vote-getters

Albert Haynesworth, Titans	18
Shaun Rogers, Browns	9
Pat Williams, Vikings	7
Jamal Williams, Chargers	6

Survey says: Don't overlook the Browns' Rogers—not that you could (he's 6-4, 350). Through Week 10, he led all interior linemen with 47 tackles, including 39 unassisted, a stunning number for a nose tackle whose first job is occupying offensive linemen.

Albert Haynesworth

Who is the hardest hitter?

Leading vote-getters

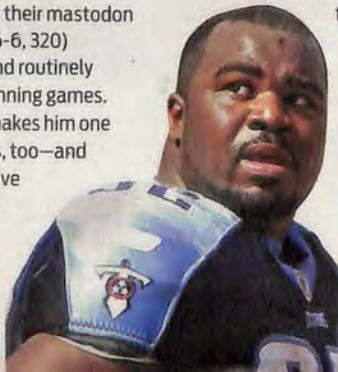
Ray Lewis, Ravens	15
Brian Urlacher, Bears	6
Troy Polamalu, Steelers	5
Rodney Harrison, Patriots	4
Bob Sanders, Colts	4

Survey says: At 33, Lewis still brings the thunder. He may not have the quickness he once did, but ballcarriers feel his controlled rage every week. Question: Where are the young thrashers? Of the 22 players who received votes, only two (the Chargers' Shawne Merriman and the 49ers' Patrick Willis) have fewer than five years of experience.

—Carl Moritz



Ray Lewis



Q&A with Andre Johnson

When *Sporting News'* team of NFL scouts, RealScouts, ranked the Texans' Andre Johnson the league's best wide receiver in our last issue, some eyebrows might have raised. But the truth is, Johnson, 27, has been this good for some time—he averaged 6.5 catches and 79.9 yards per game over the '06 and '07 seasons. In the midst of a scorching stretch—41 catches for 593 yards in four October games—SN's Albert Breer caught up with him.

SN: Do you feel like you're the best?

JOHNSON: I've been asked that question a lot, and I do feel like I'm one of the top receivers in the league, but the reason I've always avoided saying I'm the best is because I never put up the numbers like the top guys. That's what I always say when I'm asked.

SN: Have opponents changed the way they play you?

JOHNSON: Teams have been doing the same things to me since I've been in the league, but now since we have Coach (Gary) Kubiak here

and his system, I've been given more opportunity than in the past. This year, I've been given more chances; more footballs have been thrown my way.

SN: Are you as good as you've ever been right now?

JOHNSON: I think this year I'm playing smarter, I'm seeing the field, I'm picking my spots and recognizing defenses. I'm getting better, rather than just flying around and rushing things. Larry (Kirksey), my receivers coach, always told me, "You have the tools. Become a smarter player." It's knowing when to play fast, when to slow down, how to deal with zone—that's been what I'm doing.

SN: With guys like Santana Moss, Reggie Wayne, Clinton Portis, Vince Wilfork, Ed Reed and Jonathan Vilma doing what they're doing in the NFL, do you look back in amazement at those University of Miami teams you played on?

JOHNSON: Yeah, I do. I hear it all

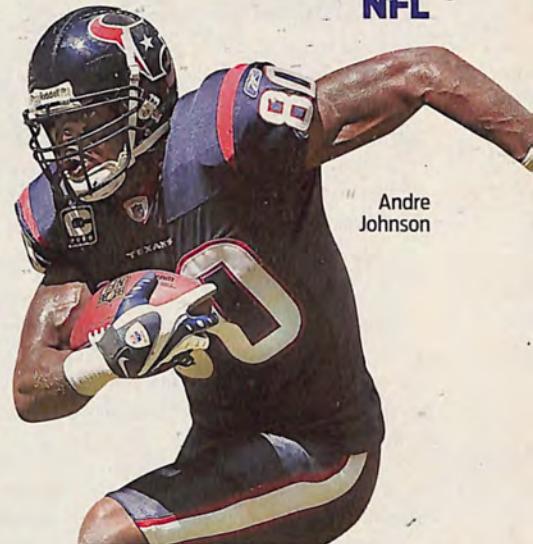
the time from my teammates. Guys say, "You guy's had an NFL team in college." Every time college football is brought up around me, they always bring up those teams. It's a blessing to have played with all those guys.

SN: Do you take a lot of pride in their success?

JOHNSON: Definitely. I watch my former teammates, and I'm pretty proud of it. Me, Reggie and Santana, we always text each other, especially when one of us has a big weekend, just to say, "You had a great week." We're all fans of each other, and we all love seeing each other play.

SN: Has the upheaval within the organization been tough?

JOHNSON: It has. We changed offensive coordinators when Dom (Capers) was here. Then Dom was fired, and Coach Kubiak came in. We had to learn a new system, and I feel like I've adjusted to it. It was tough at times, but it's working now.



Andre Johnson

A whole 'nother level

Andre Johnson was named to the Pro Bowl in 2004 and 2006, and—now that he's healthy after missing seven games in 2007—he's on pace to obliterate his statistics from those seasons.

Year	Rec.	Yards	TDs
2003	66	976	4
2004	79	1,142	6
2005	63	688	2
2006	103	1,147	5
2007	60	851	8
2008	120	1,616	4

'08 stats are projected

WHEN ALL YOU WANT
IS FOOTBALL

THURSDAY
NIGHT FOOTBALL

NFL NETWORK

THURSDAY NOV 20
BENGALS vs STEELERS
KICKOFF 8PM ET

THANKSGIVING NOV 27
CARDINALS vs EAGLES
KICKOFF 8PM ET

30 is the new 25

NFL players are staying at the top of their game longer than ever, so we asked a few how they do it

Three members of SN's All-Over-30 team—Buccaneers running back Warrick Dunn (33), Seahawks left tackle Walter Jones (34) and Vikings cornerback Antoine Winfield (31)—talked to *Sporting News*' Albert Breer about life as a 30-something in the NFL.

SN: What's the biggest difference in the way you take care of yourself now vs. the way you did when you came in the NFL?

DUNN: When you're young, you can just get up and go. Now I'm sure to get all the massages, get in the cold tub, do all those little things for maintenance.

JONES: You just start taking care of yourself a little more, eating right, getting in that cold tub. As a young player, you can recover much more quickly.

WINFIELD: Mainly more rest. I just make sure I get all I need. Plus I have three boys now, so they put me to bed. It's more rest and getting in the cold tub and eating right.

SN: How different is your workout routine? Your diet?

DUNN: You can't eat the same things you did. It's more pasta, more baked fish, chicken. You do have days where you can splurge and eat what you want. ... The only fast food I eat is Popeyes—being from Louisiana, I gotta eat that chicken from Popeyes. I love fried chicken, fried catfish, so I eat fried foods, but not nearly as often.

JONES: It's a year-round thing. You want to maintain your strength, and you never want to come in out of shape. ... I've got a personal chef now, to make sure I eat right. When you're young, your metabolism works faster. So, now you have to watch what you eat.

WINFIELD: I definitely try and eat right, a lot more fruit. And in my workouts, I squat more. We don't lift heavy during the season, so that's all maintenance work. I was a McDonald's fanatic when I was younger. When I was in Buffalo, I mean, I stayed at McDonald's.

"I definitely try and eat right, a lot more fruit. ... I was a McDonald's fanatic when I was younger."

—Antoine Winfield



Warrick Dunn
Buccaneers

Walter Jones
Seahawks

Antoine Winfield
Vikings

about stuff, getting his work done and having his fun after work.

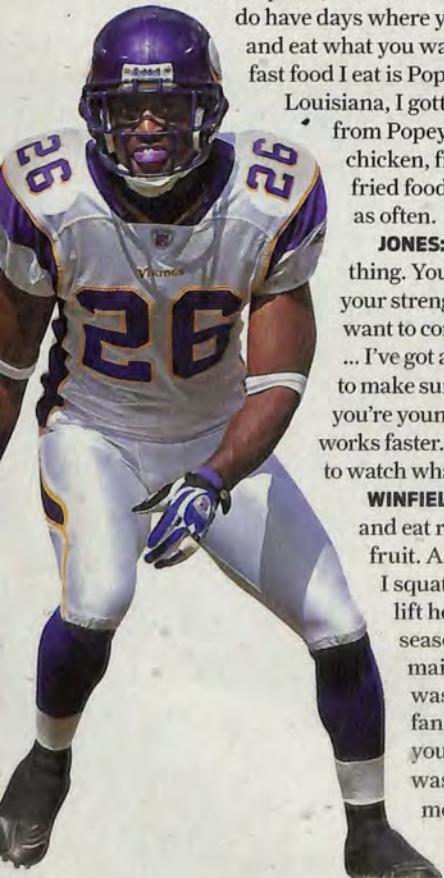
WINFIELD: It was Kenny Irvin (with the Bills from 1995-2001). He was a starting corner in Buffalo, and he was going into his sixth or seventh year. He was married, he had a family, and he was a pro.

SN: What strikes you about the way the younger players of today play vs. you guys when you came into the league?

DUNN: For me, the mentality is different. When I came in, we respected the game a lot. Now, the mentality is different. The whole culture, that whole generation, the hip-hop generation, the cars, money, women.

JONES: I don't think you can hate on those guys, but I think they have it easier. We had to earn respect. When I came in, we had older guys to put us in our place.

WINFIELD: As a corner, everyone after they make a play they're imitating Deion, dancing or high-stepping, try to be Prime Time.



SN: How much harder is it to bounce back from games?

DUNN: As you get older, it takes a little longer to get the body back to full strength or get back from an injury. But I try and continue to get a lot of sleep, drink a lot of water, Gatorade and not a lot of Coke.

JONES: It takes about three days. After a (Sunday) game, my body feels good by about Friday—after getting treatment and doing the stuff I need to do. On Friday, I feel good. When I was younger, on Monday after a game, I'd feel great.

WINFIELD: It's not that bad, actually. You might think it would be, with my game, which is playing physical, making tackles. ... If we play Sunday, I feel like I'm back physically around Tuesday night.

SN: Have you lost anything over time?

DUNN: I can't run all day anymore. I can't do that, and I'm sure I'm not as fast as when I was 25 or 26.

JONES: Probably speed and quickness. That comes with it. But experience and having been in the game ... you can make up for it in ways.

WINFIELD: Probably explosion. When you're younger, you can run all day, you're explosive. That's the whole thing as you get older—you lose a step in that area.

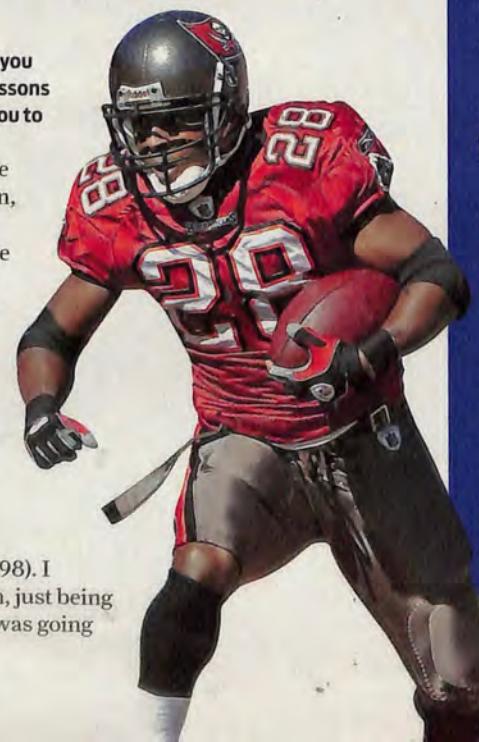
"I can't run all day anymore. I can't do that, and I'm sure I'm not as fast as when I was 25 or 26."

—Warrick Dunn

SN: Was there a veteran you looked up to and took lessons from that have gotten you to this point?

DUNN: I watched the way (Hardy Nickerson, with the Bucs from 1993-99) practiced, the way he was attentive in meetings, how he knew all the assignments. He was always prepared, and he made sure to take care of his body.

JONES: Howard Ballard (with the Seahawks from 1994-98). I learned a lot from him, just being a pro and the way he was going



SN's All-Over-30 team

OFFENSE

PLAYER	AGE
QB Kurt Warner, Cardinals	37
RB Warrick Dunn, Buccaneers	33
FB Tony Richardson, Jets	36
WR T.J. Houshamzadeh, Bengals	31
WR Hines Ward, Steelers	32
TE Tony Gonzalez, Chiefs	32
LT Walter Jones, Seahawks	34
LG Steve Hutchinson, Vikings	31
C Olin Kreutz, Bears	31
RG Randy Thomas, Redskins	32
RT Jon Runyan, Eagles	34

DEFENSE

PLAYER	AGE
DE John Abraham, Falcons	30
DT Jamal Williams, Chargers	32
DT Pat Williams, Vikings	36
DE Shaun Ellis, Jets	31
OLB Keith Bulluck, Titans	31
MLB Ray Lewis, Ravens	33
OLB Joey Porter, Dolphins	31
CB Antoine Winfield, Vikings	31
CB Charles Woodson, Packers	32
SS Lawyer Milloy, Falcons	35
FS Brian Dawkins, Eagles	35

—RealScouts

Peterson: He'll break your hand and break your team's back



Troy Aikman

You might watch Adrian Peterson and marvel at his ability to read the defense, make sharp cuts and burst through a hole. You might jump off your sofa when he lowers his

shoulder and steamrolls a safety or linebacker.

But you'll never understand Adrian's true impact until you shake his hand. Let me tell you, it hurts. First time I met him, in his rookie year, I thought he broke my hand. I've never shaken hands with anyone like that.

After meeting him down on the field, I go up to the booth with Joe Buck. So, I say, "Just met A.P. Bigger than I thought. Smart. Humble. Hungry. Impressive guy. And dude almost broke my hand." Joe just starts laughing. Everybody in the booth does. He could take the air right out of the football, pop it, if he squeezed it hard.

On the first Monday night game this year, Tony Kornheiser, after shaking hands with Adrian, tells the same story on the air. I just had to laugh. At least I can laugh about it now. Everybody who knows Adrian now knows not to shake his hand. Fist bump, bang knuckles, hug, whatever.

I still shudder just a bit when I think back to that handshake. It must be how defenders feel when they think about tackling him. It's a painful experience, mentally and physically. He'll humble you real fast.

He lowers his shoulder and sends guys flying. You look at his upright running style and you'd think that would leave him wide-open to take a lot of big shots—that was a knock on Adrian when the Vikings drafted him out of Oklahoma—but that hasn't been the case. He's the one delivering the blows. So as a defender, you don't just have to worry about catching him, you have to worry about getting him to the ground without hurting yourself. And he's cat-quick, too. It's a dangerous combination.

I had a front-row seat to watch one of the great backs of all time, Emmitt Smith. Adrian, no doubt, is just as special. NFL defensive coordinators now have a year and a half of tape on Adrian and still can't stop him. He'll threaten a lot of records if he's able to stay healthy.

I've been aware of Adrian for a long time. He grew up a couple hours down the road from Dallas in Palestine, Texas, and then went to Oklahoma. And since he has been in the NFL, I've been able to get to know him a bit. On top of his athletic skills, he's just a wonderful person and a great competitor. The great ones all have that determination and competitive strength, that willpower to not be denied.

We saw that in Week 10 in Minnesota's big game against Green Bay. He got stuffed on a fourth-and-1 play in the fourth quarter. He was angry and stormed off the field. Don't make this man angry. Well,

the Vikings got the ball back with just under 6 minutes left, down by six. You could just see it in his eyes; he was a man determined to get the ball in the end zone. Everybody in the Metrodome knew he was going to get the ball, and the Packers couldn't stop him. He touched the ball on six of seven plays, capping the drive with an amazing 29-yard touchdown run. That's the thing about Adrian. Even when you stop him, you know he can beat you on the next touch. He couldn't beat Green Bay on his first 32 touches of the game, but he did on No. 33.

He just keeps coming at you, coming at you. Every time he gets the ball, he expects to score a touchdown. And we all hold our breath hoping he does it. His nickname is All Day for a reason.

Troy Aikman, a Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback, is a regular contributor to Sporting News and host of the weekly Troy Aikman Show on Sporting News Radio.



Peterson is one strong guy—and he has a lot of ways of showing it.

A holiday story: Adrian and the three Bears

In three career games against the Bears' typically stingy run defense, the Vikings' Adrian Peterson has rushed for 423 yards and seven touchdowns. With the teams set for a big NFC North game on Thanksgiving weekend, three Bears break down the challenges of keeping Peterson from feasting on a defense.



Elusiveness:
"He's a big back who plays like a small back. He's able to cut back against the grain and outrun

everybody. It's hard once he gets into the secondary. So the key for us up front is to get our big guys, our 290- and 300-pounders, on him fast."

—DE Adewale Ogunleye



The chess match:
"You stay in your gap and try to get penetration before he can get started. If

you try to play outside the defense, you may mess up the guy next to you. But sometimes you have to take chances, too. If you get him to negative yardage, it makes you feel as athletic as he is."

—DT Anthony Adams



Breaks in containment:
"When he gets into the secondary, we just have to get him down. Just any way we can, whether it's hitting him high or hitting him low."

—CB Trumaine McBride

—Vinnie Iyer

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SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Titans vs. Giants: The edge goes to experience



Brian Baldinger

It's a question that just might be decided on the field in Tampa in February, but it's a hot topic in November: Who's the better team, the undefeated Titans or the reigning Super Bowl champion Giants?

Really, there's not much separating the Titans and Giants; they are pretty similar teams. There's nothing gimmicky or complex—they just look to beat you up at the line every week.

That means physical football, on both sides, with the emphasis on a strong, versatile running game and stout front seven play.

On offense, the Giants execute immediately in every game. They come out running and keep on running. They get excellent run blocking from their line, tight ends and fullback, consistently moving bodies out of the way. They can run out of any formation—power, shotgun, spread—and they never run out of carries for



Brandon Jacobs, Derrick Ward and Ahmad Bradshaw.

The Titans have their own combination of speed, pop and toughness with rookie Chris Johnson and third-year mauler LenDale White. On the line, center Kevin Mawae is schooling whoever lines up against him, and tackles Michael Roos and David Stewart shine on the edges.

Both teams have a simple passing scheme. If Giants quarterback Eli Manning sees Plaxico Burress man-to-man, he can go to him. If not, Amani Toomer is open on the other side, and Manning also likes to work the middle. If Titans opponents focus on Johnson and White, quarterback Kerry Collins—like Manning, well-protected and rarely touched—looks for his big wide receivers and tight end to move the chains.

On defense, *pressure* is the buzzword for both teams. Ends Justin Tuck and Mathias Kiwanuka lead the way for the Giants, and tackle Albert Haynesworth is the Titans' dominant, disruptive force. Each team has underrated linebackers, with good leaders in Antonio Pierce (Giants) and Keith Bulluck (Titans).

The Titans have the more complete secondary with Nick Harper and Cortland Finnegan at corner and Chris Hope and Michael Griffin at safety.

The Giants are more settled into their offensive and defensive systems and showed their mettle in passing so many tough road tests on their way to winning Super Bowl 42. They have picked up where they left off and show no signs of being pushed from the top.

Brian Baldinger, an NFL offensive lineman for 11 seasons, is a regular contributor to Sporting News, Sporting News Today and Sporting News Radio.

It's hard to imagine anyone being as good as Kiwanuka and his teammates on the Giants' defensive line, but the Titans just might be.

A breakdown, from the guys who know

With a lot of folks predicting a Giants-Titans Super Bowl, *Sporting News* asked several members of the Bengals, the only team that has played both squads, to compare the two teams. Cincinnati lost, 24-7, to Tennessee in Week 2 and, 26-23, to New York the following week.

WR Chad Johnson on the secondaries: "Both are very explosive. The front four that they've got is ridiculous. That ain't fair. It's like an all-star defensive front, which makes it easy for their secondary. If you block the front four, you can eat the secondary up. They're human. But with the pressure they put on in the front, you can play DB with a cigar."

Edge: "I'd probably give the edge to the Giants. They might be a little bit more talented."

LT Levi Jones on the defensive lines: "As far as just dominating everything, (Tennessee's Albert)

Haynesworth has been known to do that a lot more. As far as speed rushers, I would say they're different type of players. (New York's Mathias) Kiwanuka does a lot of different things. (Tennessee's Kyle) Vanden Bosch is just a thousand miles an hour in whichever direction he's going."

Edge: "That'd be like comparing a bull rusher vs. a speed rusher. I'd take either one."

DE Antwan Odum on the offensive lines: "The Giants are powerful and physical. They work together and play together as a team. The Titans' line, I

think they do the same, but they've got more athletes on their line. (Left tackle Michael) Roos is very athletic. And they've got (center) Kevin Mawae, who has a lot of experience."

Edge: "Ooh, that's hard because they're both real good. But I'm gonna go with Tennessee."

OLB Rashad Jeanty on the running games: "(Tennessee's) Chris Johnson and LenDale White are a nice complement to one another. (Johnson is) fast and hits the edge and breaks your ankles, and LenDale is just a great changeup back; he runs downhill with power. We did a good job

against the Giants' backs. They didn't impress me too much."

Edge: "I'd give the edge to Tennessee because their line is a little more stout."

FS Marvin White on the quarterbacks: "Eli (Manning) is a good quarterback. He lets his receivers do a great job of working for him. He puts the ball in the right spots for them. Kerry Collins reads the defense a lot better because he's played so long and knows the game."

Edge: "I'd definitely give it to Collins. That veteran experience overcomes a lot of things."

—Chick Ludwig

This is ... Nick Collins

Fourth-year free safety, Packers ballhawk



- **Born:** August 16, 1983, in Cross City, Fla.
- **Height/weight:** 5-11/207
- **Drafted:** Second round (No. 51) by the Packers in 2005
- **College:** Bethune-Cookman
- **Welcome to the NFL moment:** "Before my first Monday night game (as a rookie in 2005 at Carolina). All the lights, my family was there. It was like, 'Wow, I'm here!'"
- **Best performance:** This season, during the Packers' 34-14 Week 7 win over the Colts. In helping Green Bay's secondary contain Peyton Manning, Collins had a 62-yard interception return for a touchdown to put away the game.
- **Favorite part of playing safety:** "I like making all the calls, lining everybody up, putting everybody in the right position."
- **On learning from cornerbacks Al Harris and Charles Woodson:** "They have taught me how to study offenses, understand the concepts that they try to use on our defense."
- **Best thing about playing in Green Bay:** "My teammates. It's just a great environment. It's just one unit—no guy is bigger than the other guy. We play like a team every week."
- **When not playing football:** "I'm spending time with family, the movies, out to eat, a little golf. I'm an average golfer; it's just my second year playing. The hardest part is getting to the green. If I make it to the green, I'm good."
- **Testimonial:** "I think Nick has kind of grown up in this defense, No. 1, as far as the understanding of the scheme. The maturity of recognizing the opponent is definitely an asset that he's gained through film study. ... He's really kind of come into his own this year."

—Packers coach Mike McCarthy

—Vinnie Iyer

I Remember ...

Jerry West

Former Laker, 14-time All-Star

Thirty-five seasons ago, Hall of Famer Jerry West retired at age 35 as the third-leading scorer in league history, a Finals MVP and an NBA champion. But for West, a relentless perfectionist, it's hard not to focus on what didn't go well. His Lakers lost eight NBA Finals, and he retired after a year in which injury limited him to 31 games. To understand the drive that made West, G.M. of the Lakers from 1982-2002, one of the NBA's greatest, *Sporting News* talked to him about his final season.

My last season was horrible. I was a holdout in training camp when I already had a contract, which was about the dumbest thing I ever could have done. Then 28 games into the season, I suffered a groin injury that would keep me out virtually the rest of the season.

I came back for the playoffs after two or three practices, which was not a lot of fun going against high-level players who were playing at their best. I had to be injected (with a painkiller) before the game and at halftime, and that was not a lot of fun. Being injected wasn't confined to me at that time. If you could play at all, you would do it. In all my time as an executive, that didn't happen with any player I knew. Times had changed, and because I went through it, I would not have wanted anyone else to.

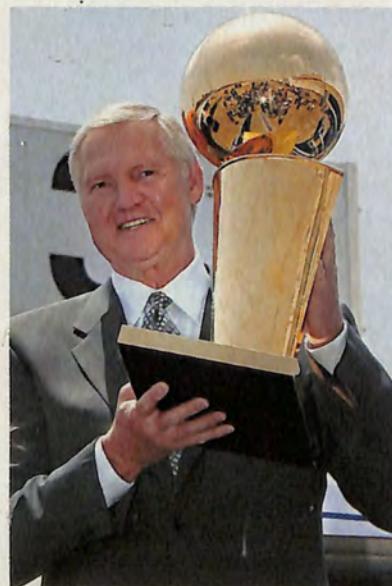
After we won our first game against Milwaukee, I was so sore that I couldn't play the next game (the Lakers lost the series). Ending my career like that was horrendous.

The pressure from the team and, more importantly, the pressure I put on myself, made it difficult to continue. The only way the team was going to win at the time was for me to perform at a high level, but my skills were declining and because of the injuries, I couldn't perform up to my expectations. To avoid any kind of awkward situation with a franchise that had been so good to me, I decided not to play anymore.

When I look back, I don't think so much of the good times because I've never been one to think they were all good times. It still

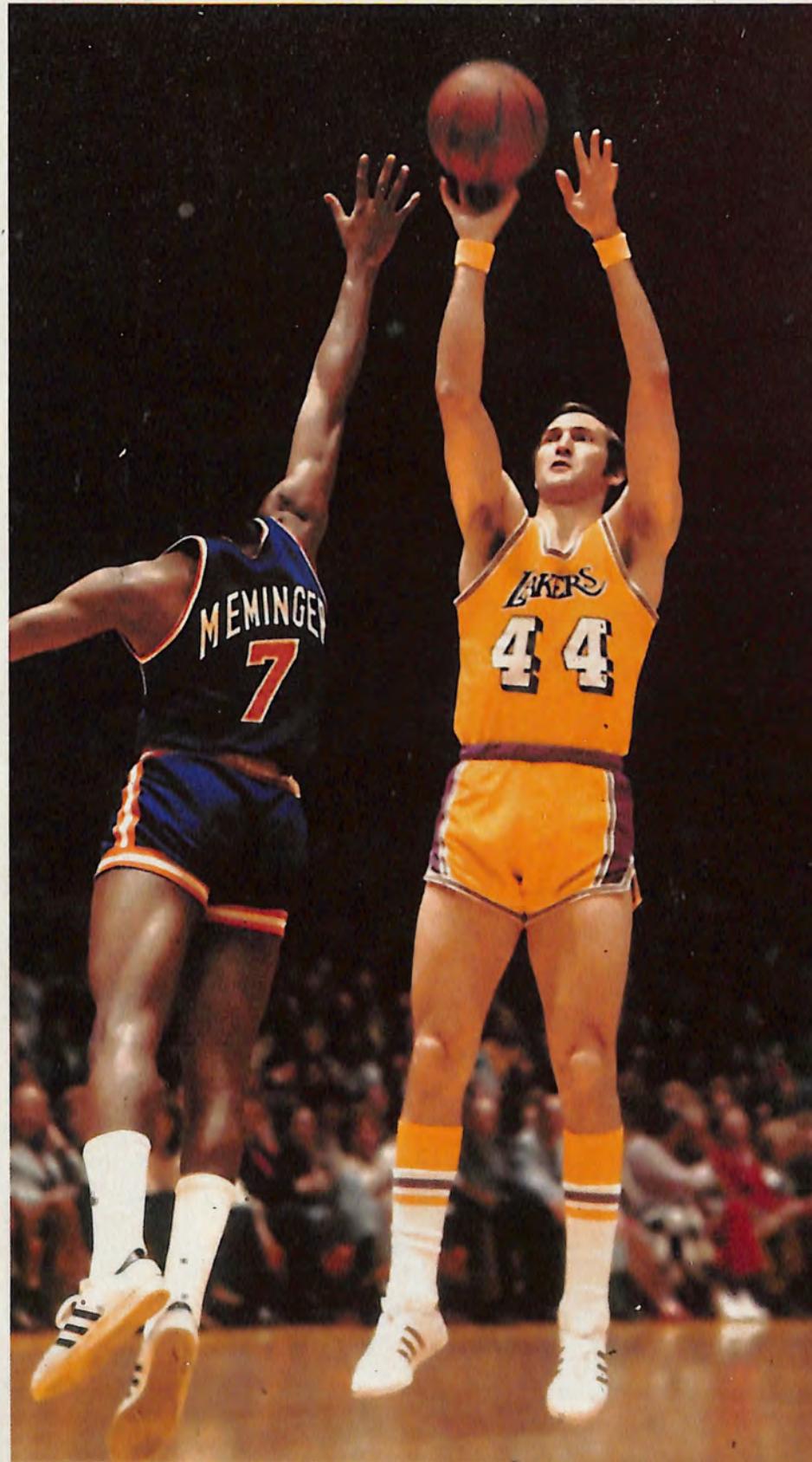
haunts me that we lost the championship two or three times when I believed the best team did not win. To win only one championship left a huge void. To this day, that has left some scars on me.

—As told to Stan McNeal



West's brilliant playing career didn't end the way he wanted it to, but he went on to have plenty more success as an executive.

YOUR TURN Who starred in your favorite childhood sports moment? Let us know, and we'll try to track him down. E-mail your suggestion, along with your name and hometown, to editors@sportingnews.com.



WEST: DAMIAN DOVARGANES / AP; WEST (PLAYING): DICK RAPHAEL / GETTY IMAGES

Golf needs to stage an intervention for Daly

By John Feinstein

Nine years ago, on the night Payne Stewart died, one of the first people to get to his house to try to help Tracey Stewart and her children deal with the tragedy was Lee Janzen—a neighbor, a friend and a rival. He and Stewart had battled to the wire 18 months earlier at the U.S. Open, Janzen winning by a stroke.

The phone rang and Janzen answered. It was John Daly, who had heard the news about Stewart's plane crashing. "John was in tears," Janzen remembered recently. "He kept saying, 'It should have been me, not Payne. I should have died. He was too good a guy to die.'"

That story, among many others, cropped up again as the 2008 PGA Tour season wound down in the wake of yet another incident in Daly's chaotic life. This time, he was picked up by

police outside a Hooters in Winston-Salem, N.C., apparently passed out following another bout with alcohol.

The news hardly came as a shock to anyone on tour. But it also saddened almost everyone because to those who know him, Daly is a supremely talented player and a remarkably likable man. He just can't seem to overcome the demons in his life that have consumed him to the point where he appears—as Janzen's story illustrates—to have a death wish.

"There's not a guy out here who isn't pulling for him," says Davis Love III, who, like Daly, travels the tour in a motor home. "Around the motor homes, when someone needs help with something, the first guy to volunteer to help is John. But he just can't seem to find any peace in his life. It's painful to watch."



Daly is a beloved figure on the tour, but he needs to take better care of himself.

The sports world has been watching Daly's painful story unfold piece by piece since he burst into the public consciousness in 1991, when he got into the PGA Championship as the ninth alternate and won going away. He was a good ol' boy who hit the ball a mile and then went and drank a beer with anyone who wanted to lift a cold one with him.

Of course, that was the problem. Daly was an alcoholic, and, even as his popularity grew, his problems took over his life. He was in and out of rehab and bad marriages. Until the arrival of Tiger Woods, he was easily the tour's most popular player. He won the British Open in 1995 during a sober period and started drinking again soon after.

Since then, he has won once—in La Jolla, Calif., in 2004—but lately, he has been little more than a sideshow. This year, he played in 17 tour events and made five cuts. His highest finish was a tie for 40th.

If only playing lousy golf were Daly's biggest problem. Ely Callaway, the late golf club guru, paid off all of Daly's gambling debts in the 1990s and signed him to a contract for big money with one proviso: go to rehab, get sober and stay sober. Daly completed Steps 1 and 2 but couldn't handle the third.

If you ask other players, they will tell you that one of Daly's problems is the enablers surrounding him—tournament directors who give him sponsor exemptions because he still sells tickets and the hangers-on who enjoy telling people they pal around with John Daly.

"I think we've all run the spectrum of emotions with John from sadness to anger to frustration," says longtime pro Joe Durant. "I love John—we all love John—but he has to learn to love himself. I know how tough the disease is. In the end, he has to decide he wants to straighten his life out. No one else can do it for him unless he wants their help."

Butch Harmon wanted to help. Golf's coach to the stars recently worked with Daly, trying to help him find his missing swing.

"I told him from the beginning I wasn't going to be another enabler," Harmon says. "I told him he had to stay



Acclaimed author John Feinstein is a regular contributor to Sporting News. Feinstein has written 23 books, including No. 1 best-sellers *A Season on the Brink* and *A Good Walk Spoiled*.

out of bars on tour—even if he wasn't drinking. I told him the only way I could help him with stuff on the course is if he was willing to work on his life off the course. He said he would do it, but then he didn't. It was more of the same thing.

"After I quit (in March), someone said to me that I had fired him as my pupil. I told him that wasn't true—he fired himself."

Says Love: "Butch was the one guy in John's life who was willing to tell him the truth. The problem is John doesn't want to hear the truth... John's one of the good guys out here. That's why people care about him. We all want to see him straighten his life out before it's too late."

Those last words are ominous—but meaningful. Daly is only 42, but the path he's on is one that can lead to disaster. It's time for PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem to tell tournament directors not to give Daly any more exemptions and have his fellow commissioner overseas do the same thing. It would be golf's version of an intervention.

Finchem would probably insist he doesn't have the power legally to do such a thing, but he could pull it off if he wanted to. He would certainly have the backing of the players, who know these are desperate times that call for desperate measures.

Sober, Daly could still light up the tour with his game and his outgoing personality. But that's not what's really important right now. What's important is that sobriety can save his life. And, regardless of what he may think, John Daly's is a life worth saving.

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